The future of electronic entertainment issue#124

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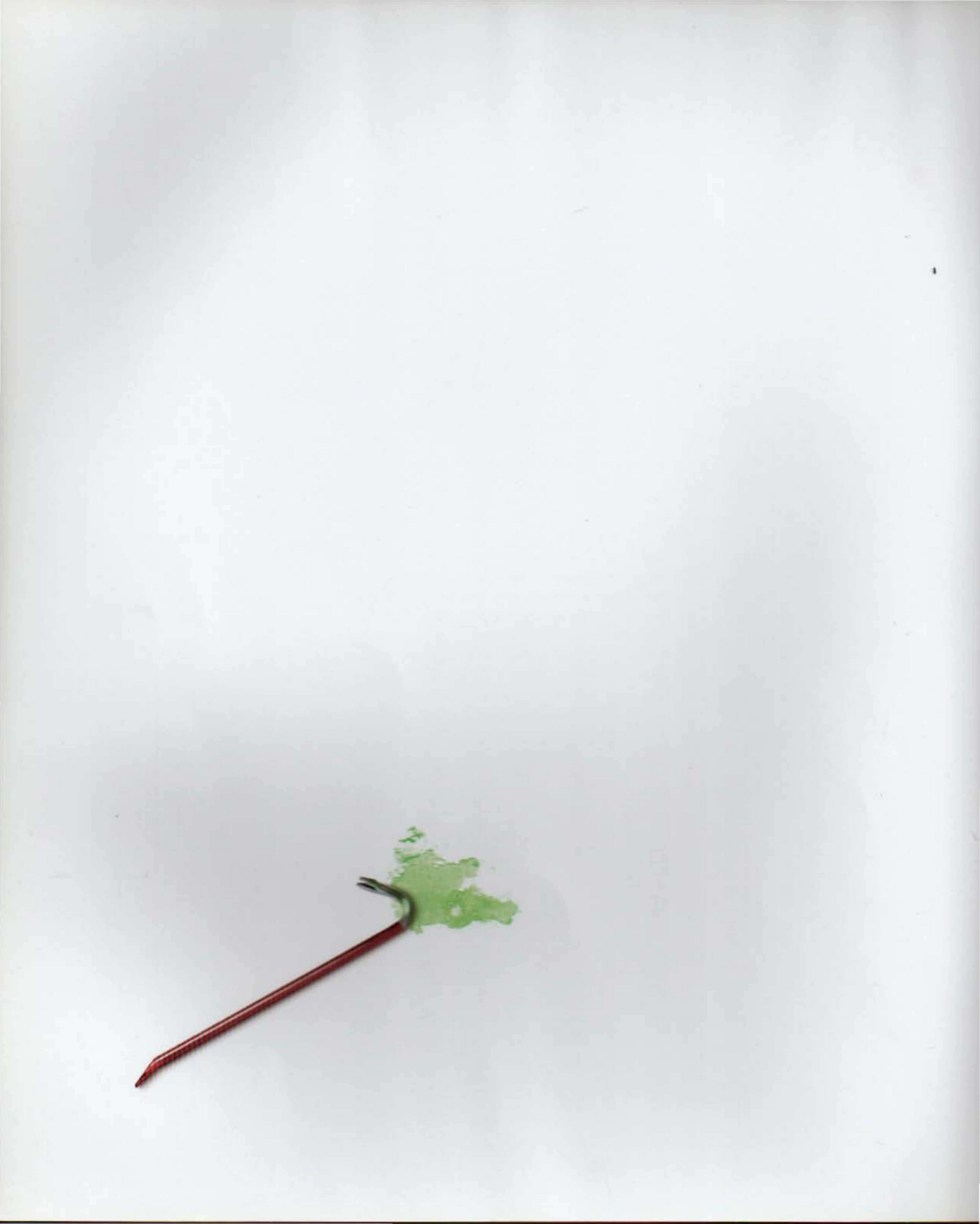
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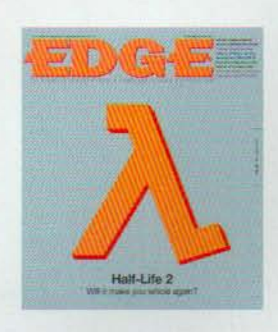
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Half-Life 2

Will it make you whole again?





The greatest FPS ever," said many when *Half-Life* launched. Or at least, those who hadn't played *GoldenEye* some three months earlier. Far from an attempt at instigating a tedious and pointless Valve versus Rare debate, **Edge** is trying to illustrate the remarkable significance of 1998 for the firstperson shooter genre.

From what **Edge** has seen, the sequel (p48) threatens to repeat the impact of its predecessor. Given the advances the FPS has made over the last five years this would be a monumental achievement. Yet what has proved most exciting when researching this month's cover feature is the revelation that Valve has reinvested *Half-Life* profits back into the company, essentially isolating itself from publisher pressure. No board meetings. No marketing men. No development milestones. It has retained absolute creative control, even as far as eschewing a licensed engine. For a team of this calibre you couldn't wish for a more productive working environment and the prospect of what it can accomplish free from the usual restrictions is thrilling. That is why it's so exciting.

Another potential obstruction Valve hasn't had to contend with (at least until recently) is having to deal with PR representatives constantly demanding screenshots or interview opportunities. It's a role that is often mentioned within these pages though rarely exposed. And it's one we feel that, as consumers paying £40 for a game, you should be aware of. Pages 64–71 should do that.

To redress the balance (and continue the issue's theme which you'll notice extends to other areas of the magazine), there's some introspection, too. Like PR types, some readers genuinely understand **Edge** magazine and its scoring system, some pretend to, others never will. We therefore reveal the truth behind videogame reviewing with a feature (p76) that should set straight the misconceptions surrounding the difference between our critiques and those of the competition.



Features



048

042 Prescreen focus: Carve
A jetski videogame to finally rival *Wave Race 64*? **Edge** visits Argonaut Games to investigate

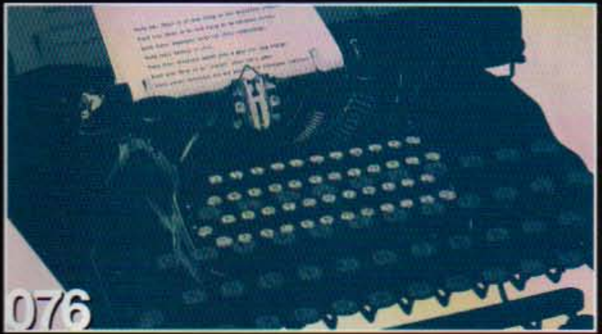
048 Prescreen focus: Half-Life 2
The World's Best Firstperson Shooter to many, *Half-Life* gets a sequel at long last

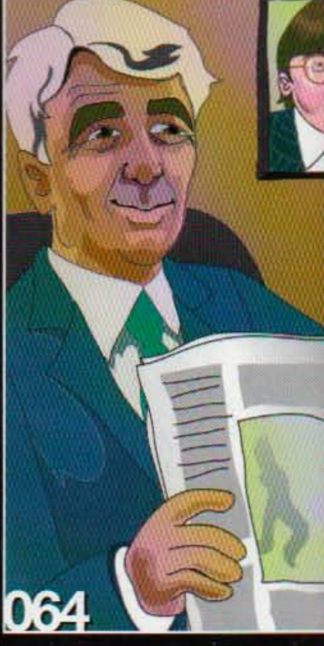
054 Dance Dance Evolution
Simplistic or overly complex? **Edge** examines the misunderstood genre of rhythm action

064 Public Revelations
Edge avoids the spin to discover who's playing whom in the world of videogame PR

076 Points of Review
Eight pages. Seven truths. Six journalists. Videogame reviewing exposed







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the 'two halves make a whole' issue





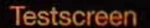














Regulars

006 Frontend
BBC's 'Fightbox'; onedotzero; Sega and Namco merger

016 Out there
Ninja Tunes/Hexstatic party; portable Xbox screen; Jagfest

020 RedEye
He doesn't want to be in *your* gang anymore

022 Trigger Happy
Are games becoming all work and no play?

024 AV Out
Nagoshi-san is back from holiday

026 Biffovision
Coprophagy and videogaming: together at last

072 Subscribe
Money off and free delivery – how can you resist?

074 Back issues
Quick, before they sell out

109 Retrotest
It's 1985. **Edge** reviews *Way of the Exploding Fist*

110 The making of...
C64 favourite, *Uridium*

114 Reset
E60 put through the rememberiser

115 Recruitment
Your chance to work in the games industry

128 Inbox
Your opinions on the world of videogaming

130 Next month
E3

Prescreen

030 Powerdrome (PC, Xbox, PS2)
032 Hidden & Dangerous 2 (PC)
034 Between Good & Evil (Xbox, PS2, GC, PC)
036 Fire Warrior (PC, PS2)
037 Broken Sword III: The Sleeping Dragon (PC, Xbox, PS2)
038 Dinosaur Movie-Maker (PC, Xbox, PS2)
038 Chibirobo (GC)
039 Ice Nine (PS2)
039 Catan (PS2)
041 Prescreen Alphas (various)

Testscreen

088 Soul Calibur II (GC, Xbox, PS2)
092 Amplitude (PS2)
094 Silent Hill 3 (PS2)
096 P.N.03 (GC)
097 Eve Online (PC)
098 Breath of Fire: Dragon Quarter (PS2)
099 Dodonpachi: Dai-Ou-Jou (PS2)
100 MotoGP: URT2 (Xbox)
101 Clock Tower 3 (PS2)
102 Vietcong (PC)
103 Made in Wario (GBA)
103 Golden Sun: The Lost Age (GBA)
104 WWII: Frontline Command (PC)
104 Dynasty Warriors 4 (PS2)
105 Warrior Kings: Battles (PC)
105 Medieval: Total War – Viking Invasion (PC)
106 Tao Feng (Xbox)

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"Hey Ray, I never went down. You never got me down, Ray. You hear me? You never got me down."



Goggle box gets 'Fightbox'

BBC launches crossplatform TV series to woo the 'Robot Wars' generation with videogame competition



After several years of neglect, the nation's public service broadcaster has finally turned its attention to videogames again. But 'Fightbox', a new series to be aired on BBC2 and BBC3, is not so much *about* games as much as it is a novel extension of the videogame medium itself.

The show is a clear demonstration of the growing interest in videogames from mainstream TV channels after ITV's 'Game Stars', but it's also been responsible for the creation of some new and interesting technology that might be used to produce similarly convergent programmes in the future. Consequently it will have been in development for some three years by the time it's aired in the autumn.

The TV show itself will represent the final rounds of a competition that will be open to Internet users from this May. Players create online avatars, termed warriors, from a selection of body parts, which convey particular attributes, and use them to play several downloadable minigames. The scores achieved in these minigames are then used to acquire more expensive body parts with which warriors can be enhanced, and, ultimately, ranked, with the top 60 warriors going through to the televised finals. These minigames (and indeed a spin-off standalone videogame on PC and PlayStation2) are currently in development at the BBC's Gamezlab studio, drawn largely from ex-Runecraft employees.

But the fun really begins in the TV studio, where participants compete, 'Robot Wars'-style, against several elite warriors, or Sentients, across various events – with the victor winning the chance for their avatar to become a Sentient in a second series. "'Fightbox' will be shot using ten cameras in front of a crowd of around 200 people," explains executive producer, **Nick Southgate**. "The arena is a sort of oval shape with a pit in the middle – very much like a gladiatorial amphitheatre."

Creative and technical director **Finbar Hawkins** picks up, "Each show will have a knock-out structure around two heats played across the Eliminators. The Eliminators were devised specifically with two important elements in mind – good gameplay for the contestants and a good audience experience, something that will quickly communicate to people at home and will be visually engaging. For this reason we've looked at games that will test different modes of play – jumping, agility, tactics – like different sports, and that will look and behave significantly different from each other when you're watching them."

But the most interesting thing about the show is its use of technology. The series uses the BBC's FreeD virtual camera system and depth-keying technology, the combination of which allows a composite picture of virtual avatars competing in a real arena to be filmed like a sporting event. "What the virtual camera system allows us to do is create realtime composite images," clarifies Southgate. "So the Warriors will be keyed over the real set and in front of the real audience in realtime. All the camera operators will see the composite image in their viewfinders – so they'll be able to follow the live action just like any sporting event. We are also developing a groundbreaking bit of technology called depth-keying which allows us to do live multi-layering – so the virtual characters can be either the foreground or the background or indeed both. This may not sound like much, but we don't think it's been done before and it's going to really make the experience come to life."



The studio audience won't see the composite images as the home audience will, but their experience will be enhanced by one or two tricks – such as vibrating floors, or gusts of air

"The BBC's FreeD virtual camera system and depth-keying allow virtual avatars competing in a real arena to be filmed like a sporting event"

Clearly this is a significant technical endeavour, and when **Edge** saw a technical demo, it was still pretty early; if there are doubts, the biggest concerns the quality of the minigames and whether they will consequently draw a sizeable enough audience for the programme. Nevertheless, a BBC spokesperson is confident that the development process is well on track, stating, "We are now engaged in marrying the gaming software with all the elements of the TV studio software and hardware, in order to deliver a truly seamless viewing experience. For example, the studio lighting and the lighting in the gaming software have been integrated so whatever shadows hit the TV presenters and human contestants, similar lighting affects each warrior and Sentient."

Another minor concern is the ability of the show to attract a female audience, given that a lack of female interest was cited when the BBC's last few attempts to televise videogames were canned; certainly the game's setting and aesthetic is firmly in the adolescent male sci fi/fantasy camp. But in this instance, the unlikely precedent of 'Robot Wars' in attracting a significant female audience augurs well for the programme's future.

And if it does prove successful, the show's format might be licensed to other territories, and its technology used in other formats. "The Fightbox software has been developed primarily for the 'Fightbox' project but like many other gaming engines, it is possible for it to be used in future for other, similar, games," said a BBC spokesperson. "In addition, the innovative studio technology employed to produce the TV show is something that in future, the BBC will look to make more use of, as it seeks to deliver more groundbreaking entertainment formats."

The TV programme will be shown in the Autumn on BBC3 and repeated on BBC2. For more information, and the chance to participate, visit the Website at www.bbcfightbox.co.uk





Warriors are created from a number of parts and used to compete for a spot in the televised finals. The ultimate winner will see their creation immortalised in future series

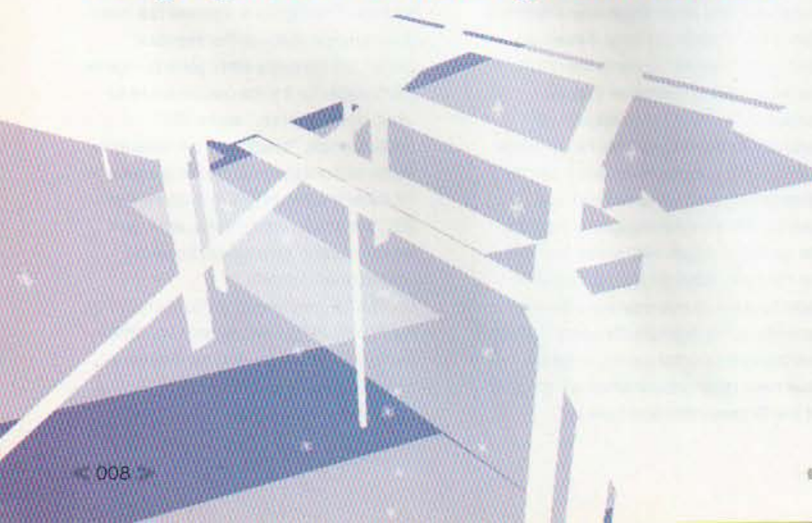
onedotzero in seventh heaven

And the 'lens flare' showreel continues to showcase the best in videogame visuals

For the seventh year running, digital arts festival onedotzero will be presenting its annual eclectic mix of filmmaking, music video, motion graphics, computer gaming and club visuals, providing an opportunity to survey the very latest innovations in digital film and gaming. Taking place from May 16–25 at London's Institute of Contemporary Arts, the festival is the world's largest dedicated showcase of digital moving imagery, and once again includes a section devoted to moving images drawn from videogames, entitled 'lens flare'.

This year's festival includes various features and special screenings, and covers a whole range of visual mediums. "onedotzero is a digital creativity festival and project which started in 1996 to explore new forms and hybrids of moving image," explains **Shane Walter**, one of the founders of the event. "In only a few years, the range of graphic moving image being produced and those making it has exploded from a handful to hundreds." Consequently, this year's contribution is as eclectic as it has been in previous years: 'wow + flutter 03' consists of various abstract sequences, for example, while 'j-star 03' presents the work of Japan's finest moving imagemakers. Other highlights include '4d space', which is devoted to exploring the impact of new media on architecture, and 'extended_play 03', dedicated to longer film shorts. Clearly, there's a certain amount of media boundaries being crossed.

"I think that games are finally being accepted as more than a pointless pastime and are being regarded in a more high-brow context"











Some of the games compiled by Emily Newton-Dunn for the 'lens flare' showreel include (clockwise from top left): *Viewtiful Joe*, *Resident Evil 0*, *Metroid Prime*, and Ubi Soft's *XIII*

"Cross fertilisation is something at the heart of onedotzero," explains Walter. "We have explored convergence from day one, mixing film with graphic design, new media and illustration. That has obviously expanded over the years to include more crossovers encompassing architecture, club visuals, fashion, photography and of course computer gaming. In fact we've had people amazed by what they've seen who had never cast a second glance at gaming before. Computer gaming aesthetics and interfaces have now gone to grace music videos, titles sequences and even tampax commercials!"

The tenth art form

The annual festival at the ICA is just one part of onedotzero's remit; the organisers are also involved in over 40 similar international events, and, as well as commissioning work to exhibit, there's the small matter of a DVD label and TV and film production.

But videogames are firmly entrenched at the heart of the exhibition, as Walter attests. "I think computer gaming is the tenth art form and a truly under-valued one that is dismissed by a large number of people. There has been a lot of talk about interactive movies and non-linear storytelling – computer gaming has not only addressed these areas but has also produced work tha[t] is sold by the millions. The capsule narrative elements of movie sequences and then playable interactive sections make the whol[e] story element much more immersive."

Consequently, the 'lens flare' strand of the festival is also in its seventh year of attempting to represent the most groundbreaking videogame visuals on the cinema screen. This year's showreel include[s] extracts from *Kung Fu Chaos*, *Panzer Dragon Orta*, *Silent Hill 3*, *XIII*, *Rayman 3 Hoodlum Havoc*, *Enter the Matrix*, *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball*, *P.N.03* and *Zone of the Enders 2* among others. It's been put together by videogame journalist and broadcaster **Emily Newton-Dunn**.

"Putting 'lens flare' together is always a tough job," she explains. "When considering submissions, we look for games that obviously look great but perhaps look a bit different as well. I think we've all had our fill o[f] the standard cel-shaded fare that there's recently been so much of. Another key ingredient is a well executed script, especially if there's a bit of humour involved. Normally, we also try to get a balance between the different types of game but that's not always possible."

Part of the difficulty in achieving this balance lies in the diverse audience that

onedotzero7

Videogames are just one aspect of onedotzero, which has, for seven years, attempted to celebrate the diversity of digital art. From J-pop to architecture, there's enormous range

onedotzero attracts. "'lens flare' will obviously appeal to the gaming hardcore but it stretches beyond this narrow appeal to other people interested in graphics and beyond," Newton-Dunn continues. "I think that games are finally being accepted as more than a pointless pastime and are being regarded in a more high-brow context."

The big screen

Edge's only criticism of the event in previous years is that 'lens flare' has tended to focus on non-interactive cut-scenes, without placing them in the context of the surrounding gameplay. But according to Newton-Dunn this reliance on CGI is down to the difficulties involved in presenting in-game footage on a cinema screen. "We had some fantastic footage of the absolutely gorgeous *Viewtiful Joe* but unfortunately, there wasn't enough cut-scene footage to be able to include it in 'lens flare'. We would have had to include in-game graphics and apart from giving the audience the urge to start playing it, in-game *Viewtiful Joe* would just have looked a mess on the cinema screen: it's way too busy after all the previous, languorous cut-scenes. The same goes for *Ikaruga*, which looks phenomenal but just wouldn't work as part of the programme. 'lens flare' is viewed in a cinema as entertainment, not a look-and-learn lesson; it's not about gameplay or any of the other criteria that a game is traditionally judged on."

Indeed that's part of the appeal of the festival's approach to videogames. And in any case, Newton-Dunn also highlights the growing convergence of in-game and cut-scene graphics. "As in-game engines evolve, CGI will progressively fall by the wayside. FMV will become an extension of in-game play; it's already beginning to happen, as in *Panzer Dragoon Orta*, where most of the cut-scenes use the in-game engine. As the technology gets more powerful, so do the graphics; it's only a matter of time before more game-engine graphics appear in 'lens flare'."

Still, that's no reason not to check out this year's selection of videogame visuals, particularly when the festival contains so many other distractions. "onedotzero's strength is in its breadth and ability to showcase new forms of innovative moving image at one place," concludes Walter. "It's this dynamic mix and interplay between disciplines that makes it stand out from the more recent festivals that follow in its footsteps."

Visit www.onedotzero.com or www.ica.org.uk for more information.





Although it won't feature sections of gameplay, the 'lens flare' showreel allows videogame cut-scenes to be enjoyed on a big screen, in a novel context, by a broad audience



Sammy's bid for Sega rocked by Namco

Meanwhile rumours continue to associate Electronic Arts and Microsoft with a possible bid for the home of Sonic



Sammy's bid to merge operations with Sega has come under threat from a competing bid from rival publisher, Namco. With the proposed Sammy/Sega merger (see **E**122) reportedly already on shaky ground due to disagreements between the two sets of shareholders, Namco's public declaration of its desire to join with Sega provides the pachinko manufacturer with some very credible opposition. And although the only official interest in Sega comes from Sammy and Namco, rumours continue to surface that both Microsoft and Electronic Arts are watching proceedings with interest.

Bad manners

Sega and Sammy remain in merger talks in spite of the Namco bid, but the proposed deal with Sammy is rumoured to have come unstuck over the past months, having met with significant opposition from Sega's investors and senior board members. Sega's major shareholders are reported to be unhappy with the behaviour of Sammy's investors. During early meetings to discuss the difficulties of attempting to focus on both the videogame and pachinko markets, Sega investors were apparently dissatisfied with the attitude of Sammy's shareholders – to the extent that, according to **Edge**'s contacts, the deal had unofficially been put on hold even in advance of Namco's announcement.





With Sega's shareholders reportedly unhappy with the behaviour of Sammy, Namco's bid could prove more attractive



Sammy's position hasn't been helped by the fact that the financial markets responded positively to news of Namco's interest in Sega – in stark contrast to the steep drop in the share prices of Sega and Sammy that greeted the announcement of its own bid. Certainly the potential synergies between Sega and Namco are more obvious, since each has significant development strengths in the coin-op and home console markets, and a joint interest in the coin-op market thanks to the TriForce tie-up.

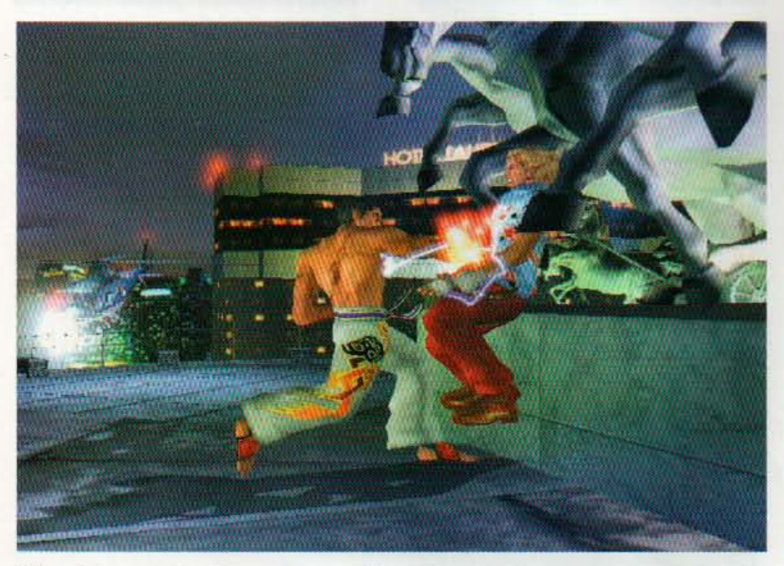
Namco has been pursuing Sega for some time now, having reportedly approached Sega in recent years to develop the new *Ridge Racer* and *Tekken* titles. Namco's weak position in the market would certainly give Sega the upper hand in any merger; having committed to a commercial partnership with Square and Enix, Namco could only watch from the sidelines as those two companies merged, and the company's currently short of personnel and technical resources. Consequently, Namco's proposal would see the two companies merge under the Sega name early in 2004.

But although Sega's official line is that it will consider the two official bids at the next meeting of the company's board of directors in June, Microsoft and Electronic Arts continue to be associated with Sega.

Despite denials from both sides, Microsoft has re-emerged as a potential suitor, with Japan's 'Yomiuri' newspaper reporting that Microsoft has approached Sega about buying a stake in the company. Nevertheless, some analysts suggest that it might be difficult for Microsoft to assimilate a developer as large as Sega.

EA's involvement, meanwhile, doesn't necessarily preclude the successful conclusion of the Sega/Sammy merger; the Japanese press was reporting that Sega is seeking an investment from EA into the combined entity, allowing the two companies to share development knowledge and distribution channels. Still, the uneasy relationship between Sega and Sammy may yet allow EA to enter into full acquisition talks.

With Sega's future at stake, any such talks with any potential suitors will be of enormous importance.



Although the synergies between Sega and Namco are more obvious than those between Sega and Sammy, there are areas of overlap, which might pave the way for another suitor

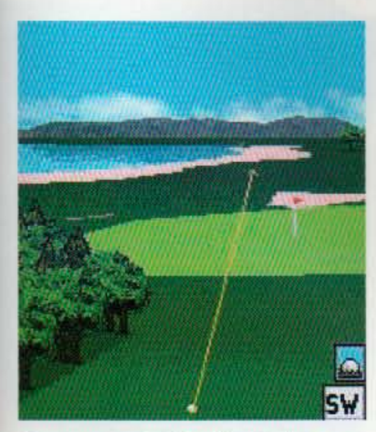
Improving the connection

The market for mobile phone games remains small, but developers at the recent Mobile Entertainment Forum remain optimistic about the future









The games remain limited, but big licences are slowly making the transition to mobile gaming as proved by the Java version of EA's *Tiger Woods PGA Tour*, coded by Iomo and distributed by Digital Bridges

The balance of power in the mobile gaming space was apparent during the Mobile Entertainment Forum's (MEF) third annual summit held at the Islington Business Design Centre. Despite the increasingly high profile marketing of mobile gaming, with the likes of David Beckham appearing in adverts, developers continue to find themselves disadvantaged, with network operators such as Vodafone and T-Mobile holding all the cards. This was reflected in the size of the conference, which was smaller than usual, as well as its location, tucked away on one of the Business Design Centre's balconies.

Rann Smorodinsky, MEF's chairperson, characterised the state of the industry saying it was suffering from converginitis; that is, 'the feeling of uncertainty when two or more unrelated industries combine, before they understand how to cooperate together in the new industry that has been created.' "It can take two years to overcome if not treated," he warned, adding that the industry needed to leverage the key technologies of the mobile space – always-on connectivity and location into suitable content.

Whether the size of the global market will reach $3.5bn (£2.2bn) by 2006, as show organiser Informa predicts, remains a moot point though. According to Datamonitor, the current size of the mobile gaming market is a mere $250-odd million – around two per cent of the overall size of the games market. At present, the most profitable part of the industry remains simple SMS games as these don't need users to have expensive handsets and provide a clear billing mechanism. Developers remain optimistic about the future however and there are some encouraging signs to back them up.

The take up of Vodafone's live! service, has reached the million-user mark in Europe, while the general rollout of colour-screen phones which can download Java games is growing apace. There are already over 2m such devices in the UK, with the total expected to reach the 12m mark by the end of the year. Another fillip will be provided by the introduction of Nokia's N-Gage, for which several UK developers are creating content.

"We've been developing mobile games for over three years now and for much of that time analysts' expectations have been over-hyped (remember WAP?)," says **John Chasey**, MD of mobile developer Iomo. "But we're actually seeing real revenues coming through the channels now."

"The growth of Java-enabled handsets, combined with marketing campaigns such as Vodafone live!, is raising awareness of, and demand for, games on phones," agrees **Brian Rodway**, MD of Affinity Studios.

But the big issue for developers remains their weakness in the overall value chain. Network operators take the biggest chunk of cash, followed by content aggregators, who are the equivalent of publishers in the console space. Developers get the slimmest pickings. One approach to get around this is being taken by Scottish aggregator Digital Bridges – boxed retail games. Its £10 SMS-themed packs of games, ringtones and icons for licences such as 'Men in Black II' and 'Scooby-Doo' have been a modest success, according to head of retail Tony Pearce. The company is now extending the range to similarly-priced packs for game franchises such as *Tiger Woods* and *FIFA* even though the colour games still have to be downloaded to phones.

CUTTINGS



Microsoft makes Xbox changes

Microsoft has announced a series of measures to stimulate consumer interest in the Xbox. Following the recent price cut, which saw the price of the machine drop to £130 in the UK, a limited edition Xbox was unveiled. The translucent green model went on sale across Europe at the start of May, packaged with two translucent green controllers at a cost of £150. In addition, the unsurprising decision has been taken to make the smaller S-controller the default controller for new Xbox units. The news of the price cut is particularly bad news for Nintendo, whose GameCube continues to lag in third place, while Sony has stated that it has no intention to decrease the price of the PlayStation2.

FairPlay campaigners bow out

After its high-profile campaign to bring about the lower pricing of gaming software singularly failed to provoke any reasoned debate from the videogame industry the campaigners behind the FairPlay Campaign have signed off. The campaign's parting shot was a press release in which it argued that it had done "more to bring the issue of rip-off videogame pricing into the public eye than has ever been done before." The release went on to present evidence that the campaign had been a success, such as Nintendo's recent conviction by the European Court for illegally fixing prices at an artificially high level and the widespread price discounts that were available over the Christmas period.

Nintendo woos thirdparty publishers

Nintendo has taken a couple of steps to strengthen its firstparty development capabilities and attract an apparently reluctant publishing community to commit to its console. The creation of an internal development facility in Tokyo, devoted to the research and development of new software should enhance the company's in-house offerings, but it's also taken the decision to cut the royalty rates on GameCube software in a bid to woo thirdparty publishers. The announcements follow a set of financial results which revealed that the company had missed its 2002 shipment targets for the GameCube.

GBA SP gets off to flying start

Nintendo attempts to translate handheld dominance into GameCube sales as the SP attracts a new audience for portable gaming



Celebrity endorsements the night before its launch helped cement the success of the GBA SP over its opening weekend

The European launch of Nintendo's redesigned Game Boy Advance was an enormous success, reaffirming the company's near monopoly on handheld gaming. 400,000 GBA SPs were shipped across Europe in advance of its launch on March 28, with 50 per cent of these being sold over its debut weekend – thanks in part to a budget of £20m that was earmarked for promoting the new portable.

Part of that budget was directed to sponsoring an exhibition devoted to the humble pocket to coincide with the launch of the SP. Thus, on the evening of March 27, several minor celebrities turned up for an exclusive private viewing of the exhibition. Ralf Little, artist Dan MacMillan and models Sienna Guillory and Catalina were all enticed by the prospect of a Nintendo goodie bag containing a Game Boy Advance SP in sleek metallic silver with a limited edition bespoke carry case. Curated by Wayne Hemingway, the exhibition, in London's West End was open to the public until April 3, and reflected a marketing campaign that was geared towards an older, more sophisticated audience than has traditionally been attracted to handheld gaming.

The fruits of this marketing campaign were evident over the launch weekend: according to Nintendo's David Gosen, interviews held over the launch weekend suggested that 55 per cent of customers were first-time buyers of handheld consoles, and that the average age was 23 – both facts that bode well for Nintendo's continued dominance of the sector.

Indeed the GBA SP is assuming increasing strategic importance to Nintendo as the GameCube continues to be outperformed by Xbox and PlayStation2 at retail, with the sales surge that accompanied recent retailer discounts and the launch of *Metroid Prime* proving shortlived. Nintendo is clearly hoping to use the success of the device to catalyse sales of the GameCube. Early shipments of the SP were packaged with a rebate voucher entitling consumers to claim £30 off the price of a GameCube and, with Nintendo reaffirming that it won't be showing any online GameCube titles at this year's E3, the company's offering in Los Angeles is set to be dominated by connectivity between its two main devices.



The GBA SP launch gave Nintendo another excuse to show off its heritage

Sony fits PlayStation2 on a single chip

Dragon chip paves the way for redesigned PlayStation2 and backwards compatibility for PlayStation3

Sony has announced that it has managed to fit the PlayStation2's various processors onto a single chip. Called the Dragon chip, it will combine the CPU (better known as the Emotion Engine) and the Graphics Synthesizer that currently lie at the heart of the PlayStation2's processing power. As well as reducing production costs and the unit's electricity consumption, the move will also allow the PlayStation2 to be redesigned as a smaller, sleeker, unit as the original PlayStation was. This new model is likely to be on sale in Japan and the US by Christmas, selling for around $99–$129 (£62–81).

While this major redesign is still some way off, the latest PlayStation2 units to go on sale in Japan have already begun to incorporate several minor modifications however. A recently launched model features enhanced DVD playback functionality and a quieter cooling fan, though the console's iLink port has been removed (the console's move into the online arena would render its continued inclusion largely redundant). Along with supporting progressive scan output and the playback of recordable DVD media the new PlayStation2 also features an in-built IR port to support a newly designed DVD remote control.

Of course, the new Dragon chip will also allow PlayStation3 to feature backwards compatibility with PlayStation2 software. Some confusion has arisen, though, regarding the core processor of Sony's next console, since the company has reportedly admitted that its high-profile Cell chip, currently under development in collaboration with IBM and Toshiba, will not be the CPU in the PlayStation3. Nevertheless, Sony continues to invest in the chip, with £1.5bn (£940m) being spent over the next three years in the construction of a fabrication plant.

Further details of the PlayStation3 architecture are to be announced at the company's next business strategy conference, though a date for this has yet to be confirmed. **Edge** has managed to procure some information from insiders at Sony though. Apparently, PlayStation3 will be even more difficult to program than the PlayStation2 was, though according to contacts inside SCEI R&D, this is partly deliberate, in a bid to eliminate developers who don't have the technical skill to develop for the platform. The decision reveals the efforts that Sony is taking in order to ensure that next-next-generation gaming represents a perceptible step-up in technical quality over that offered by current consoles. Nevertheless, it's a strategy that obviously runs the risk, due to rising development costs, of further polarising the industry.



The PS3 will probably look nothing like this. But it's going to be tough to program



Sci-Fi channel searches for ultimate gamer

Emily Newton-Dunn presents another TV quest to find the UK's videogaming champion



The Sci-Fi channel's search for the country's most competent gamer will use Vivendi's *Hulk* as a proving ground

Not to be outdone by ITV's recent 'Game Stars' show, the Sci-Fi channel is also hosting a competition to find the country's 'ultimate' gamer. In collaboration with the creators of the *Hulk* videogame, the event organisers are hoping to create the "biggest mainstream gaming competition ever staged in Britain"; no doubt a prize pot of over £50,000 will help to attract participants.

The main event

The event is to be structured so that contenders compete in regional heats, with the winners qualifying for a final to be played on the big screen at the UCI Empire Cinema in Leicester Square. The first round of heats will take place in Virgin Megastores around the country on June 13, with six semi-finals to be held in UCI Cinemas on June 28, before the finalists descend upon Leicester Square on July 5.

The total prize fund for the competition amounts to over £50,000, with a first prize of £15,000 up for grabs. Other prizes include a selection of *Hulk* and Sci-Fi merchandise, the opportunity to appear in a forthcoming Vivendi videogame, subscriptions to 'Official PlayStation2 Magazine' and VIP tickets to the UK premiere of the 'Hulk' film.

The event is being organised by the Sci-Fi channel's weekly gaming show, 'Ultimate Gamer', screened on Mondays at 6.30pm and repeated Saturdays at 5.30pm. The finals will be presided over by ex-'Bits' girl, and host of the show, **Emily Newton-Dunn**. Here's what she had to say, "Not only is Sci-Fi channel's 'Ultimate Gamer' Britain's biggest gaming competition, but it's a real first too – from the open-to-all entry mechanic and prize fund of over £50,000, to regional heats being played on cinema screens. Plus contenders will get a taste of what promises to be the most exciting entertainment franchise of the summer."

The premium rate competition phone line for would-be applicants (09069 122 644) is open from Monday April 21, with each two-minute call costing £1 per minute. All callers will be automatically entered into a prize draw for an all-expenses-paid trip for two to the world film premiere of 'Hulk' in Los Angeles. Phone lines close on June 12. For more information visit the Website at www.scifi-ultimategamer.com

Recently Reviewed

Edge brings you a rundown of last issue's review scores

Title	Platform	Publisher	Developer	Score
The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker	GC	Nintendo	In-house	9
Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	PC	Novalogic	In-house	7
Phantasy Star Online Episode I & II	GC	Sega	Sonic Team	7
Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo	GBA	Capcom	In-house	7
Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution	PS2	Sega	In-house	7
Xenosaga Episode I: Der Wille zer Macht	PS2	Namco	Monolith	7
Chaos Legion	PS2	Capcom	In-house	6
Dark Cloud 2	PS2	SCEA	Level 5	6
The Lost Vikings	GBA	Vivendi Universal	Blizzard Entertainment	6
Biohazard Gun Survivor 4: Heroes Never Die	PS2	Capcom	In-house	5
Freelancer	PC	Microsoft	Digital Anvil	5
Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc	GC, PS2, Xbox	Ubi Soft	In-house	5
Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb	Xbox, PC, PS2	Activision	LucasArts	4
Zone of the Enders: The 2nd Runner	PS2	Konami	In-house	4



TLoZ: The Wind Waker



Delta Force: Black Hawk Down



PSO Episode I & II



Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo

CUTTINGS



Capcom cancels 18 titles

Capcom has announced that it has cancelled 18 games that were in development, following disappointing financial results and the poor retail performance of several of the company's key titles. In a statement, Capcom vice president Oshima Heiji cited lower than expected sales of *Devil May Cry 2*, *Resident Evil 0*, *Chaos Legion*, *Breath of Fire: Dragon Quarter* and *Clock Tower 3* to explain why nearly a fifth of the company's development roster had been canned. Indeed it's rumoured that several games, including *Devil May Cry 2* and *Chaos Legion* had been rushed out without extensive testing in a bid to alleviate the company's financial position.

One of the consequences of the company's financial woes is that Shinji Mikami has stepped down as the chief of Production Studio 4, though he will stay with the company as a producer. Another is that *Biohazard 5* is rumoured to be heading for PlayStation3, in spite of the relatively recent high-profile decision to make the *Biohazard* series a GameCube exclusive. And finally, it's expected that the company will reduce its Xbox development efforts even further.

Sony admits error of judgement

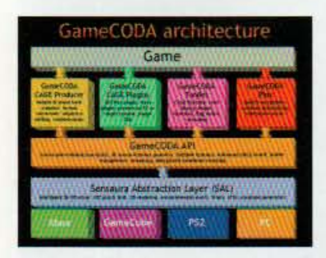
In an ill-conceived decision that was widely condemned by the world's media, Sony's US arm recently attempted to cash in on the war in Iraq by registering as a trademark a phrase used by Coalition forces during the conflict. In a stunning example of insensitive timing, SCEA attempted to register the ill-fated phrase 'shock and awe' as a trademark in the USA just one day after the war in Iraq started. The phrase was used by US forces to describe the saturation bombing of Baghdad when military operations commenced.

In the wake of the predictable media hue and cry, however, Sony swiftly withdrew its trademark application, describing the episode as "an exercise of regrettably bad judgement." Sony's European arm had earlier stated that any game based on the trademark would have been unlikely to appear in the UK owing to local tastes and sensitivities.

Sound is all around

www.sensaura.com
www.gamecoda.com

Power without control is nothing, so the newest edition to Sensaura's GameCODA audio middleware is a management layer, CAGE Producer



There are a lot of boxes but the important thing to note is that GameCODA covers all gaming platforms including PC, making the sound designer's job a lot easier

Behind the scenes

Originally part of EMI's Central Research Labs, Sensaura's initial involvement in game audio came with its development of 3D sound technology in the mid-'90s. Implemented in PC audio chips, it enabled developers to dynamically position sounds in three dimensions in such a way that they were correctly heard when played back through a standard set of stereo speakers. A deal with nVidia in 2000 brought the company into the console space as its 3D Positional Audio (3DPA) technology was included in Xbox's audio chipset. Since then, Sensaura's main focus has been creating crossplatform audio development tools, although 3DPA continues to ship in around 70 per cent of all PC soundcards.

Game audio has come a long way in recent years. Not only have full orchestral scores become commonplace for top titles but in-game samples and effects are seen as an increasingly vital part of creating a coherent playing environment. On the hardware side, consoles are supporting sophisticated multi-speaker set-ups such as Dolby and DTS 5.1 audio streams, as heard in titles such as *GTA: Vice City*, *SSX Tricky* and *Halo*. A 7.1 multistream standard is even emerging on some PC sounds cards as well. It's all good news for the player of course, but for the sound designer, the complexity of their job has ballooned.

"Sound designers typically have been poorly served with development tools," muses **Peter Clare**, technical director at UK-based audio specialist Sensaura. "I think it's because sound has always taken a bit of a back seat compared to graphics. Hopefully that's changing now."

Certainly, there's been a flurry of activity in this area during 2003, with Microsoft releasing its XACT Xbox audio tool; a move Sony has matched with the SCEE-developed Scream for PlayStation2, while Nintendo offers GameCube's MusyX. But neat as these packages are, for the majority of developers their potential is somewhat illusory as they are proprietary technologies. And that's where Sensaura sees its opportunity – bringing such functionality crossplatform.

"The key to our tools is not only that they work across all consoles but that we have spent a lot of effort ensuring we implement the highest featureset possible," Clare explains. The big obstacle has been the different audio capabilities offered by the consoles. "The easiest thing would have been taking the lowest common denominator and just exposing the basic features available on all platforms," he points out, "but then we'd have been missing out on cool things such as 3D audio and reverb because they aren't available in hardware on PlayStation2, for example."



Sensaura's initial expertise was creating 3D sound from stereo speakers but it's since gone on to develop more generalised audio middleware

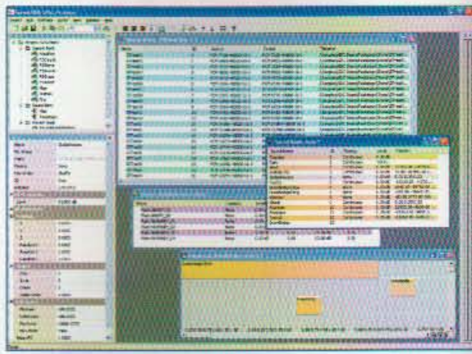


Music and audio is now a vital part of creating a believable playing world as proved by games. The first company to announce it's using Sensaura's crossplatform CAGE toolset is Lionhead, currently hard at work on *Black & White 2*, among other projects

The result is Sensaura's GameCODA. Developed to provide sound designers with a level playing field, it takes the audio capabilities of Xbox as its benchmark. Launched on PlayStation2, Xbox and PC last year, the final component to fall into place was the GameCube port. Since then Sensaura has been working on adding higher level functionality, which will increase users' productivity enormously.

At its core, GameCODA consists of a low-level Application Programming Interface (API), which gives audio designers access to the crossplatform functionality. According to Clare, however, the greatest benefit becomes apparent when combined with the newly released CAGE (Console Audio Game Engine) and CAGE Producer management layer.

"The API just provides a mechanism for getting sounds coming out of the speakers," he expands. "What we are doing with CAGE is implementing a full-featured audio engine, which means that once a programmer has done the initial integration, the sound designer can work without any further programmer involvement."



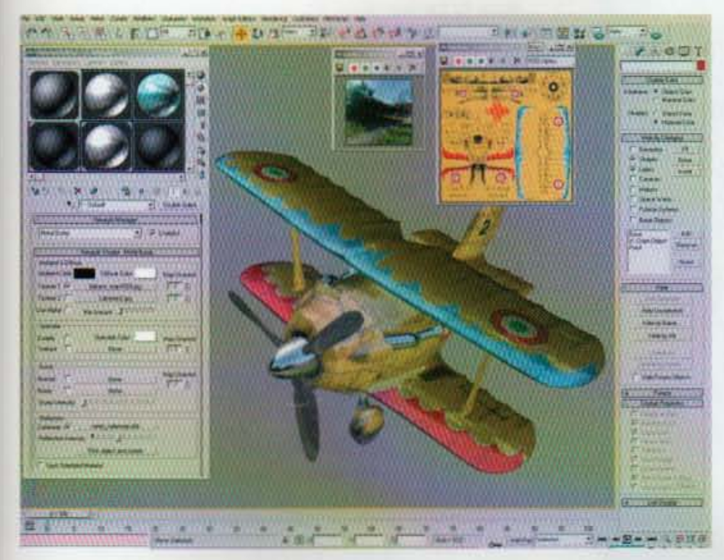
It's not pretty but CAGE Producer provides sound designers with the high-level management tools they need to get the job done

Combined with this is CAGE Producer, which lets users take raw audio files, arrange them in memory-efficient sound banks, and using the consoles' proprietary compression tools, get them into the specific formats required. It also offers other options such as creating randomised playback of files from within sound banks, as well as automatically varying individual samples' frequency and pitch, to ensure files never sound the same when played in-game. And Sensaura must be doing something right as the first company to announce it will be using CAGE Producer is Lionhead, which recently signed a multi-site deal for the technology.

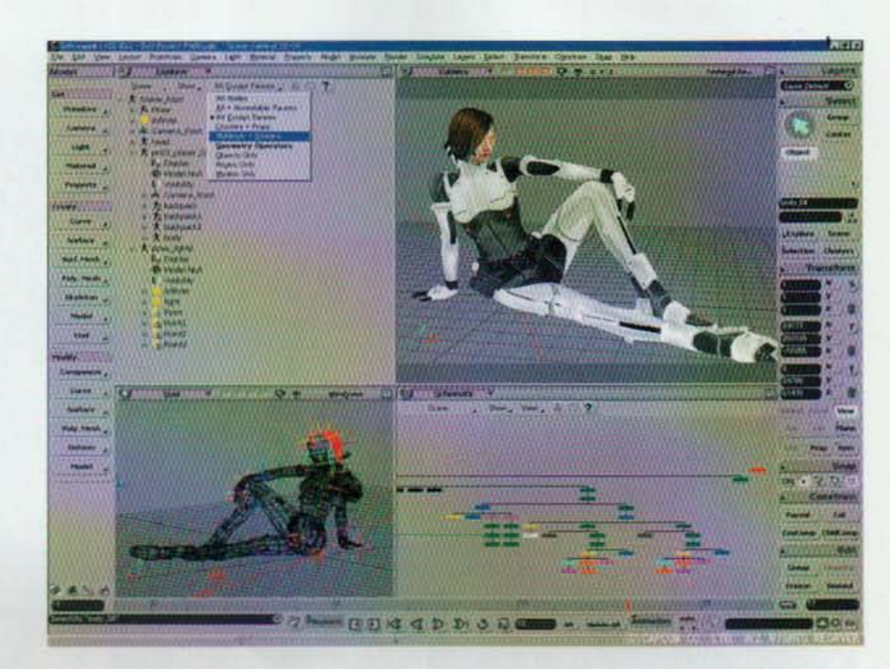
This year's model

www.aliaswavefront.com
www.discreet.com
www.softimage.com
www.newtek.com

3D modelling and animation packages are the cutting edge technology as the quality of games increasingly approaches that of film special effects



There's plenty of variety when it comes to choosing a 3D modelling package for game development. Discreet's 3ds max and Newtek's Lightwave have always been the traditional options but both are now also being used for film effect work



If there's one place where convergence between games and films is making waves, it's the once rarefied arena of 3D modelling and animation tools. It used to be quite simple. Game developers tended to use Discreet's 3ds max or Newtek's Lightwave packages, while the heavy-duty film digital effect houses got their hands dirty with Alias|Wavefront's Maya, Softimage's XSI and Pixar's Renderman.

However, with the exception of Renderman, the past couple of years have seen the tables turning. Alias|Wavefront has targeted game developers, aggressively cutting its pricing structure, and Discreet has beefed up max's support for high-quality rendering and entered the film business in flicks such as 'Star Trek: Nemesis' and the forthcoming disaster film 'The Core'. Meanwhile Lightwave scored big with the heavy-duty CG 'Jimmy Neutron' franchise.

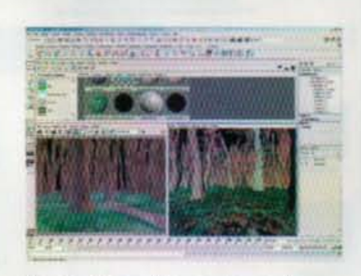
"Convergence is healthy, particularly for the next-generation games engines where cut-scenes and intros need to be more compelling," points out Discreet's European animation manager, **Nick Manning**.

Michael Stojda, Softimage's managing director agrees, "The expertise we develop for our film customers has crossed over into games and it shows. Developers are paying much more attention to the integrity of their animation pipelines, for example."

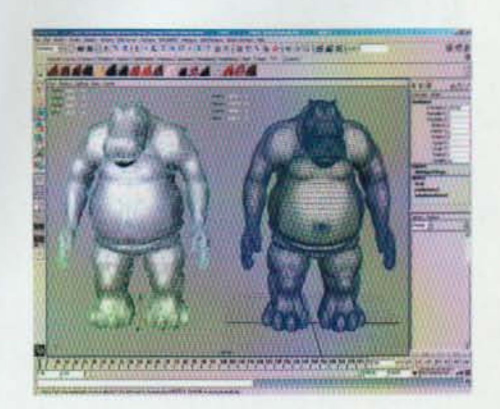
"Games are all about pipeline integration," echoes Alias|Wavefront's games industry marketing manager **Geoff Foulds**. "That's something we call pipe-a-bility." This concept, which is becoming increasingly important within the industry, is akin to creating a 3D operating system. The 3D modelling package provides core functionality, which can be extended as developers create plug-ins and tools using provided software development kits.

One result of this topsy-turvy world has been a jump in the visual quality of games, something that will be accelerated with the introduction of art tools such as nVidia's Cg and ATI's RenderMonkey shader languages, designed for both game and film creators. Another consequence of the heightened competition is the speed with which companies are releasing new products. The past month has seen Alias|Wavefront's eighth release of Maya, version 5.0, while Softimage has gone through four major releases of XSI in two years. It's also recently announced version 3.5 of XSI.

The knock-on effect for studios has been a move to consolidate their art teams around a single package. Previously they may have operated in a more ad hoc way, with different teams using different packages. Now, however, the productivity advantages of being able to move artists from team to team combined with the price war between package vendors makes it a sensible time to standardise on a package. And considering the size of some development groups, those decisions can have large commercial implications for the package vendors. Ubi Soft recently consolidated its European development over to 3ds max, which at 200-odd seats works out nicely for Discreet, even accounting for the discount it would have given on the product's £2,695 list price. Similar client wins have seen Softimage pick up the custom of Valve (see p48), while one of Alias|Wavefront's recent announcements was LucasArts' decision to become a completely Maya developer.



The latest 3D modelling package to be released is Alias|Wavefront's Maya 5.0. Originally designed to handle heavy-duty film special effect work, game developers are now its biggest market, thanks to an aggressive pricing campaign



OUT THERE

REPORTAGE



The Hexstatic audience at 93 Feet East also made like ninjas on *Shinobi*-equipped PlayStation2 pods


Edge would have liked to have made like ninjas on the dancefloor, but by then we'd had a bit to drink


These chaps didn't though; they didn't have access to VIP cocktails like the oh-so-important Edge did





Jagfest: the only place you'll see the nasty suffix 'fest' in **Edge**, at least until the next convention



01 The three ninjas

UK: Every so often **Edge** is accused of 'having it in' for Sony and the PlayStation2. Clearly this couldn't be further from the truth. Quite apart from the fact that the company that created a console home for the likes of *Ico*, *Rez* and *Frequency*, deserves the utmost respect and admiration for its creative endeavour, we're also swayed by the fact that Sony continues to throw the best parties in the videogame industry. The latest to win **Edge**'s seal of approval was in collaboration with Ninja Tunes and Hexstatic, to promote *Shinobi*. In all honesty, the easily (mis)led **Edge** didn't get to see much of the actual musical entertainment, or spend too long on the PS2 pods, thanks to the lure of 93 Feet East's magnificent boardroom shaped VIP area, where the magazine was waited upon by the ever-so-slightly-weary Joey and Mel till it felt like a company director (albeit a Malibu and pineapple infused company director). But – honestly – it was certainly another impressive Sony achievement. Probably. Hic.

02 Party like it's 1997

UK: With Infogrames continuing to exhume Atari's corpse, you'd think the last thing Atari fans would be doing right now is to actually celebrate their fetish. But that's exactly what Nick Harlow and Gary Taylor are doing with Jagfest UK, a convention for Jaguar enthusiasts scheduled to take place this summer. As well as offering rare Jaguar and Lynx carts for sale to feverish collectors, the Webpage promises that "you will be able to play all the great Jaguar games, link your Lynxes and," **Edge** gasps, "maybe dabble on your STs/Falcons." The event also promises networked gaming in the shape of Jaguar games *Battlesphere* and *Aircars*, which will provide a way of showing off two new pieces of Jaguar networking hardware – the Jaglink2 and the unfortunately named Scatbox. Jagfest UK will take place at the Medway Manor Hotel in Rochester, Kent on June 14 and 15. For further information visit the Website at www.1632systems.co.uk

Soundbytes

"By day, Mark Davies is a respected psychologist from Nottingham. But at night he becomes Bloom Eternal, a 'wood elf druid' from the tree-top city of Kelethin."

BBC News Online – old faithful for soundbyte hunters – gives some evidence that fantasy games are "not for geeks"

"Republican Guards dug in around Baghdad are little more than dots on a computer game in the minds of US commanders. Describing the tactics of US forces massed outside the Iraqi capital, one retired general recalled the 1980s arcade game *Pac-Man*, in which a big hungry dot races around a maze gobbling up smaller dots. 'I think you should Pac-Man the ring around Baghdad,' General Barry McCaffrey told the 'Washington Post'."

'The Guardian' report on new war terminology. Which fruit is Saddam?

"Edge magazine is widely respected."

The **Edge** Awards make the Trinidad Express newspaper.

The joy of tech

UK: Alex Verrey – aka Big Boy Barry, aka the man with the plan, aka all manner of things if you'll let him finish his list of aliases – has a unique approach to PR. Last month he *swore* that **Edge** is his favourite magazine, and that he can't pick a favourite staff member because he loves us all too much. And with that in mind, would we feature Joytech's PS2 screen? **Edge** didn't. He said **Edge** had broken his heart. This month, though, he approached the magazine with the most wonderful curate's egg: a portable screen for the Xbox, the most unportable machine in the world. How could **Edge** say no? The add-on comprises a six-inch RGB-compatible TFT-screen, surround-sound compatible speakers, and external AV inputs allowing users to connect a second console – and, with Joytech planning to launch an in-car adaptor to power both console and screen, playing *Halo* on the move is a real possibility. Presuming you own a minivan, that is. The screen is out in May, and will retail at £100.

Strike out

Japan: The War Against Terrorism might be big news in Real Life™, but it's long since passé for PC kids, the *Counter-Strike* community waning in the face of idiots, cheats and newer thrills. The arcade industry isn't doing much better, either, so what better time for Namco to license Valve's multiplayer FPS for use in Japanese arcades – particularly given the levels of success firstperson shooters have met with thus far in the east. *Counter-Strike Neo* features a storyline, new characters and simplified controls, and will (initially, at least) only appear at the newly-launched arcade 'LED Zone' in Tokyo. And the verdict on the streets? "It has not much of an impact in Japan at this moment," says **Edge**'s Japanese correspondent. "People just don't care."

Racer toy

Germany: If exuberant punctuation is a mark of guaranteed entertainment (a conclusion easily drawn from press releases), then what to make of a toy set so wild it disregards all laws of grammar and uses not one, not two, but three!!! Exclamation!!! Marks!!!??? 'Carrera Go!!!' is a Scalextric-a-like that, with the 'Virtureal Racing System' add-on, becomes compatible with the GBA, and allows players to control the action with the handheld. In twoplayer mode, the GBA screen can display fuel consumption, car damage and pit stop warnings. The system also measures and saves laptimes and, brilliantly, can record one lap of controller input as a 'ghost' car, letting you race against yourself. The set including track, cartridge and cars will have an RRP of £100. For more information, call Nikko UK Ltd on 01707 377771.

Data Stream

Number of consecutive loss announcements for Sega: **5**
Percentage cut in profit forecast for year ending March 2003: **90**
Namco's proposed start date of Namco/Sega merger: **Early 2004**
Percentage gain for Namco shares after the news: **1.3**
Percentage gain for Sega shares after the news: **15.7**
Combined annual sales of Namco and Sega: **¥350bn (£1.8b)**
Percentage of Japanese software market: **10**
Percentage of Japanese arcade market: **30**
Sega's response: **It's thinking about it**









Namco's conversion of the popular FPS has met with little enthusiasm in Japan. If only terrorists were cuter







It's everything Edge could ask for, twoplayer slot car racing against the only other worthy opponent: Edge





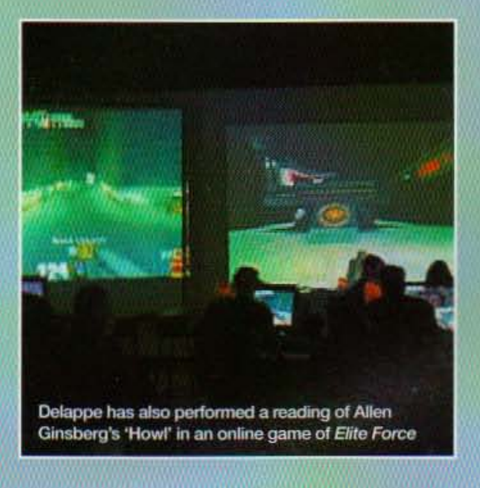
The courses are hardly F1 standard, though. Where are the tyre barriers around that loop the loop?



Poetry in a wargame? It's like being on a *Ghost Recon* server with **Edge**, except with less squealing



Chandler, in one of his 'big' seasons. Armour plating hides natural bulk well, as long as it isn't hooped



Delappe has also performed a reading of Allen Ginsberg's 'Howl' in an online game of *Elite Force*

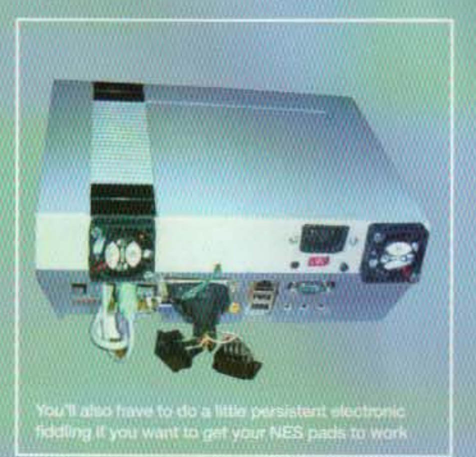
Can someone do that spoken word bit of the Girls Aloud single on a game of *Battlefield 1942*? Thanks



Of course, the absolute best thing about the NES was the creaky spring in the cartridge mechanism...



But clockwork CD drives are hard to come by, so those who upgrade have to make do with a whirr...



You'll also have to do a little persistent electronic fiddling if you want to get your NES pads to work



Still, if you can, that means you can run a NES emulator, and bring yourself back to square one. Ace

06 Art attack

US: Nevada: On hearing that Joseph Delappe, an associate professor in the Department of Art at the University of Nevada, Reno, works in the digital medium, **Edge**'s thoughts immediately turn to comedy/hideous Photoshop jobs that slow down office email servers the world over, particularly Future's. But Delappe's work is somewhat more conceptual than that of **Edge**'s last art editor, which mostly consisted of members of the **Edge** team doing things to each other that'd make Ryo Hazaki blush. On March 8, Delappe and six of his associates performed a live reading of a script from 'Friends' on a public *Quake III Arena* server, logging on as Rachel, Ross, Phoebe et al, and typing in the dialogue line by line. The virtual actors played passively, refusing to fight back, to the confusion of other players. But **Edge**'s favourite quote actually comes from one of the artist's earlier performances, reading as WWI poet Siegfried Sassoon on a *Medal of Honor* server. ICE651's "PLZ. WOULD YOU SHUT UP YOU FAG" was probably not how the poet hoped his work would be received.

07 Family Computer v2.0

US: The Japanese name for the NES, Famicom, comes from a written contraction of 'family computer'. **Edge** is sure you already knew that, but it's just making things clear for this spectacular bit of wordplay: Tim Wasson's DIY project has succeeded in literally 'contracting' a family computer so it fits inside the gorgeous plastic shell of a Famicom. And, by running a NES emulator on the PC – as long as you own the original cartridges, and delete all roms within 24 hours, and turn around, touch the ground, bagsy ELSPA don't come after you – everything comes full circle. Presumably the next step is fitting the internals of a NES inside a PC, and producing a beige box that it's actually possible to play games on without blue screen and heartbreak. Put the guns down, PC fans – **Edge** is just kidding. It'd never encourage you to humiliate a NES like *that*. More information at www.junkmachine.com/nintendo



EyeToy
Everyone loves it, just like everyone should
Primal's marketing campaign
Sophisticated adverts and a large marketing spend benefits the game
Erotic Spot the Difference
The first touch-screen interactive pub quiz. 10/10

Quit

Wargames
Shock and Awe? Back to Baghdad? Tasteful
Primal's marketing campaign
Shame it didn't also do it with *Ico*
The BBC
Where's the serious videogame programme the industry deserves?



08 Detail

Many reasons have been proposed for the elegance of Japanese industrial and consumer design. Some think the lack of raw materials has forced companies to focus on quality, while others argue it's to do with their relatively diminutive physical size or the general population density – Japan has more than twice as many people as the UK crammed into a similar land area. Maybe it's the precise nature of the culture as demonstrated by its calligraphy and martial arts. Whatever, Andrew Davey, the creative director of London-based design company TKO Design, doesn't try to resolve the quandary in his book, 'Detail: Exceptional Japanese Product Design'. Instead, he seeks to place the products of household names such as Sony, Pentax, Canon, Yamaha, Mizuno, Honda and Shimano into a context of excellence.

Like most coffee-table tomes, there's more eye candy than brainfood of course – the glossy photography is provided by the companies concerned, while the occasional passage of explanation verves close to hagiolatry. Nevertheless there are some strong sections too, particularly the opening one discussing the Japanese obsession with personal robots, which range from Honda's pint-sized ASIMO to Sony's various Aibo doggy companions and Seiko Epson's microbots. Camera buffs will have their attention piqued by the space given over to Canon, Pentax and Fuji products, while Mizuno's revealing of the process behind its 200-gramme football boot for Rivaldo demonstrates the extremes of technical anality. But whatever your particular fancy, 'Detail' is guaranteed to induce consumer fever. Watch out credit card.

09 The Art of Interactive Design

Back in the early days of computer games, Chris Crawford was the king of game design. His book, 'The Art of Computer Game Design' published in 1982, is a seminal, if now dated, text on macrodesign. Games such as *Balance of Power* and *Eastern Front 1941* remain classic examples of strategy gaming and he was instrumental in founding the Game Developers Conference. But like many of the early pioneers, he never seemed at ease with the way the industry developed. An idiosyncratic character, Crawford also seemed to have too many wider interests to fit into the increasingly risk-adverse environment offered by games. One of those was Erasmatron, his ongoing interactive storytelling project, of which, in a sense, this book is a part.

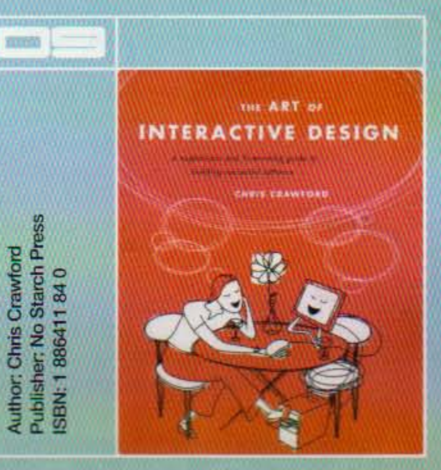
Always keen on language – the book is subtitled 'A euphonious and illuminating guide to building successful software' – Crawford starts from first principles. "Are rugs interactive?" he queries in the first chapter's review questions. And with a working definition of interactivity trashed out, so the book continues, discussing the fundamental issues of what computers are and are not good at, and how such constraints can be harnessed to create rich and more intuitive games, Websites and software. Crawford's demand is that software, even games, are important and hence should be designed to work as well as possible in conjunction with their human users. It's not always an easy book to read though. His magpie tendencies means he's often pointing out this and then that shiny object, but the bottomline remains this is inspiring stuff.

08



Author: Andrew Davey
Publisher: Laurence King
ISBN: 1 85669 318 X

09



Author: Chris Crawford
Publisher: No Starch Press
ISBN: 1 886411 84 0

10



Site: **Lemon64**
URL: **http://www.lemon64.com/**

10 Website of the month

If **Edge** is going to promote an Atari even in one section of Out There, the yin and yang needs to be balanced, or the ire of (zimmerframe-wielding) Commodore fans will go unchecked. Put down your crayons, children: **Edge** is not biased, and here's your Website of the month – Lemon64, a smart, professional, and regularly updated resource for all fans of the C64. With a thriving community presumably plotting Commodore's comeback in the forum, it's probably best to get friendly with them now – else when the 'C=' logo gets hoisted on flagpoles across the country, you'll be first against the wall. Well, after the Jagfest attendees obviously.

11 Advertainment

Japan: This month, *Taiko No Tatsujin*, Namco's great drum-beating game promotes family harmony.



The sound of drums. Yuki's mother speaks: "Yuki, don't spend your time playing." No response. "Yuki!"



Yuki, bless her, is determined. "Yoshiko, it is me playing," says the girl's grandfather. "Oh. Really?"



Cue sentimental piano music as the girl and grandfather enjoy a meaningful wordless moment.



Not having been brought up to be selfish, little Yuki invites her grandfather to play.



"Do you want to play?" the wise man asks his daughter. "Sorry, I'm too busy," Yoshiko replies.



"Yuki, why don't you play with your grandfather?" she offers. "Yessssss mum!" And everyone is happy.



The same piano tune returns. Followed by a PlayStation2 logo and the message: "It is here."



REDEYE

A sideways look at the videogame industry

Progress: it's all about compromise

This column isn't for *you*, so turn the page and go read something else. It's catharsis, RedEye supposes, or maybe made for the few of you who... well, we'll come to that. Like the serial killer in a made-for-TV film, RedEye's anger management consists of biting his lip and counting to ten. And, like the serial killer in a made-for-TV film, sometimes it works and sometimes the countdown runs out, and it ends in tears.

So. There are some wonderful, wonderful games to come out of Japan. Of course there's also a lot of shit, just like from the west – and yes, we've done this before, but wait for the tangent. One thing Japan does better than anywhere else is the common-or-garden shmup. Like *Ikaruga*. How wonderful that Infogrames has finally done something useful, and brought a game which seemed destined to remain in the hands of the hardcore – remember those Dreamcast pre-orders, and the predictions that the title's worth would exceed that of *Radiant Silvergun*? – into Game and the mainstream. It's a delicious title, too. There is something gorgeous about the way enemies in J-shmups sprinkle bullets like ice cream toppings, and the way that *Ikaruga* lets you lap them up. Only those of the right colour, mind, and RedEye's mind has been snapped regularly since the DC release, so much so that he stepped back, away, and towards a different game of the same ilk – *Shikigami No Shiro*.

Shikigami contains a system called the Tension Gauge, in which the effectiveness of the player's fire is proportionate to their distance from something that will kill them. It is a much simpler system than *Ikaruga*, and the lack of complexity means it is also ultimately less rewarding. But it is the ability to describe its key hook, the thing that makes it special, in a sentence, that may have made it an appropriate target for XS games.

XS games imports Japanese oddities and converts them to the US market. You might think this'd be considered a noble art among gaming's self-professed elite, the 'hardcore' who import these games from Japan on release and wax lyrical on fansites about their kana credentials. In fact, XS has been vilified in that community for what it's done to *Shikigami*. Its crime? The vertical mode has gone. The fan art section has gone. The storyline has been removed. The boxart has been replaced with generic busty-blonde trash. It's been renamed *Mobile Light Force 2* and given sequential status to another Japanese shooter, *Gunbird*, with which it has little in common. The voices have been dubbed into English. It is software rape, the imperialist western brute forcing its ideals on the exquisite Japanese maiden.

But once again, lost in hardcorier-than-thou pretensions, the people condemning XS have missed the point. The publisher hasn't done this for fun; every change has been made to make the game more accessible to an audience who wouldn't buy a spirit-themed manga shmup, and for whom a preposterous amount of entirely peripheral Japanese nonsense and the option to turn their TV on its side won't do anything other than confuse. At its heart, the game is identical. An excellent shooter gets released for $12, and thousands of people who'd never have sampled the delights of a vertical scroller end up thrilling to *Shikigami*'s fantastic dynamic. Besides, why do the hardcore have to sulk? If you're so desperate to interpret the subtle metaphors of the plot, you can bloody well import. You? Yeah, you.

"It's a lazy Sunday afternoon, and our hobby is on TV. It is a significant step forward but, churlish to a man, you blew it. Well done"

Easter Sunday, and 'Game Stars' finally goes to air. At just-past 3pm, videogaming got its biggest mainstream outing since, well, ever. It was meant to be the day we would celebrate, the day we could finally stop chasing Violet Berlin around the cable channels, fantasising about Krotoski and her comrades, petitioning for mainstream acceptance. It's a lazy Sunday afternoon, and our hobby is on TV. It is a significant step forward, one for which we should be thankful – but, churlish to a man, you blew it. Well done.

So much negativity, so much unjustified rage. Irritated that The Greatest Gamer was 15 and worse at *Tekken* than you? Your fault; *you* didn't enter. Annoyed that Terry Alderton wasn't an A-list celeb? You'd have been annoyed if the production team had picked someone without a clue about videogames, too – Alderton cracked knowing jokes about *Metal Gear* and Codemasters between takes. You're angry that John Thompson said 'Wind Walker', or that Sara Cawood stumbled over 'Con-ven-ant' in her *Halo* précis? You think anyone who the show was meant for noticed. You're outraged at how you've been misrepresented? Bullshit: if they'd represented you, with your Kanji's-so-cool t-shirts and faded black jeans, anyone with any sense would have switched off way before Jade hit the screen.

Just shut the fuck up. 'GamesMaster' wasn't as good as you remember. Everyone recalls the Dave Perry Moment, or the time Dominik made those smutty comments at the female C-list celeb. No one remembers the tedium of watching schoolkid X mash the fire button on generic tennis game Y, or of listening to yet another cheat read out by Patrick Moore, copied straight from 'Super Play'. Sure, bits of 'Game Stars' made RedEye cringe, but Jesus, what do you want?

RedEye knows what you want. You want something to validate your obsession with the obscure, to make you feel smarter at the expensive of excluding everyone else. You think *Ikaruga* and *Shikigami* make great TV, and, thankfully, your influence means nothing to anyone with any power within TV. Thankfully, because if it did we'd truly have set back the cause of putting our art form in the public eye 20 years.

RedEye can see the beauty in *Rez*, but asking for it to appear on primetime's like putting a show about Kandinsky on kids' TV; a small victory for those who specialise in that area, but offputting to everyone else. Sometimes you have to make concessions to move forward. The only way anyone's going to pick up a 2D shooter these days is if it's cheap and painted like something they recognise. Maybe they'll go on from that to something better, and maybe, just maybe, one day they'll be just like you. And you know what? God help them if they are, because right now the hardcore seems like a poisonous place to be.

RedEye is a veteran videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with ***Edge****'s*

The German philosopher of culture **Theodor Adorno** once observed that the products of mass entertainment secretly had much in common with work in industrial society. "Amusement in advanced capitalism is the extension of work," he wrote. "It is sought after by those who wish to escape the mechanised work process, in order to be able to face it again." He was speaking at the time of cinema and popular music (he especially hated jazz, the poor thing), but one wonders what he would have thought of videogames, so many of which themselves appear to offer little more than a 'mechanised work process'.

If games are supposed to be fun, Adorno might have asked, why do they go so far to replicate the structure of a repetitive, dead-end job? One very common idea in games, for example, is that of 'earning'. Follow the rules, achieve results, and you are rewarded with bits of symbolic currency – credits, stars, skill points, powerful glowing orbs, whatever – which you can then exchange later in the game for new gadgets, ways of moving, or access to previously denied areas.

The only major difference between this paradigm and that of a real-world job is that, whereas the money earned from a job enables you to buy beer and go on holiday – that is, to do things that are extraneous to the work process – the closed videogame system rewards you with stuff that only makes it supposedly more fun or involving to continue doing your job, rather than letting you get outside it. It is a malignly perfect style of capitalist brainwashing. Even the common idea in many Nintendo games of being able to take 'time off' to play a fishing sub-game or catch chickens can be read, on this analysis, as a cunning subterfuge to keep the masses happy: after all, they are still caught within the system.

In the overarching economic systems of games as diverse as *Super Mario Sunshine*, *Deus Ex*, or *Primal* everything boils down to a matter of shopping. New skills – whether they be new physical moves, spells, or the ability to transform into a demon – are acquired instantaneously and thoroughly through currency exchange. The idea of gradually nurturing and learning a skill is largely absent, although this would be psychologically more rewarding. If I could save up and spend £10,000 to become an instant kung-fu master, that would be cool, but I wouldn't be as proud of my kung-fu as I would if I had acquired the ability through the normal channels of years of hard training. Even a game as apparently sophisticated as *Deus Ex* can only offer a bland mechanical parody of 'learning', in which the next level of ability in, say, lock-picking can only be bought, not practised and learned for oneself.

The extent of the learning possibilities in most games boils down to becoming able to manipulate the mechanics, and memorising maps. The fact that new bits are added to the mechanics throughout the game, whether through increased physical activity or the acquisition of tools (Mario's new nozzles, Link's hookshot, Raiden's high-frequency blade, and so on), does not make this a true learning process; rather, it amounts to a cynical carrot-and-stick routine. And though a beat 'em up such as *Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution* is primarily structured around a gradual learning and practising paradigm, it is not the perfect expression of it, since the skills to be learned are 'quantised': you cannot experiment with throwing a specific punch in slightly different ways, but must learn to manipulate sequences made up from the quanta of predefined and unchangeable moves.



TRIGGER HAPPY

Steven Poole

Are games becoming all work and no play?

the designers have decided they have to do next, and there can be no argument. It's not a request; it is an order. Meanwhile, the very first speaking character they encounter in Oblivion is a horned demon lord who immediately sets them off on a job: to find his son. Yes sir, yes sir, three bags full sir.

Of course a comprehensible goal-oriented structure is a useful thing, to stop a videogame becoming a sprawling mess of undermotivated wandering and backtracking. But while the just-following-orders structure works acceptably in military-themed games such as *Splinter Cell*, which after all do pretend to be more or less 'realistic' representations of the job of a counter-terrorist or special forces agent, where a commander delivers objectives and the soldier finds ways to implement them, the idea seems more rebarbative the further one strays from quasi-simulation into pure fantasy.

Apart from comic early representations of menial jobs such as *Tapper* or *Burger Time*, indeed, some kind of military position was for a long time virtually the only real-life job represented in videogames, apart from the venerable genre of football management. Yet what we are seeing now is an increasing labourisation of the game atmosphere: from the wry alternative employment market of *GTA: Vice City* to the square-jawed life fantasy of *Toca Race Driver*, games become structured around a fictional career.

"If games are supposed to be fun, why do they go so far to replicate the structure of a repetitive, dead-end job?"

It would surely be interesting to attempt a game, of whatever genre, in which you began with all the skills and gadgets or weapons you needed, but you weren't sure what some of them were for, and needed to practise others to understand how to use them more effectively. Rather than the top-down, modular approach to 'education' applied by current games, this would be a true process of exploration.

But again it seems that would be to give the player too much power, under the current wage-slave paradigm of videogame design. Big enemies have long been called 'bosses', but the real boss in such a structure is the voice that is constantly telling you what to do next. Sony's architecturally lavish and conceptually bankrupt *Primal* is a good example of this: Scree, your somewhat lovable igneous sidekick, is really a middle manager disguised as a helpful friend. When Jen asks him for hints, he tells her what

It would be nice to think that the famous episode in *Shenmue* where you actually have to go and get a job driving fork-lift trucks within the gameworld was an ironic acknowledgment of the job-like nature of too many games. But perhaps it is inevitable that, as products of decadent late capitalism, most videogames will, consciously or not, reflect the same values. You go through a period of training, and then it's all about success and shopping, keeping your head down, doing what the system expects. Make-believe jobs, as the Marxist Adorno might have concluded, are the opiate of the people.

Steven Poole is the author of 'Trigger Happy: The Inner Life of Videogames' (Fourth Estate). Email: steven_poole@mac.com

From this month, I am unsure what is going to happen to my column. I'm so busy at the moment that I really thought that I would have to stop writing it. When you don't have time to do something properly, when you're having to force yourself to do it, well, you can't produce anything good. I don't think any of you would enjoy reading work written under those conditions, either, but I've agreed with **Edge** to keep trying and do my best to keep it going. I hope that you will continue to enjoy and support the column.

By the way, I've noticed that I'm always telling you I'm dead busy. Why is that? I mean, sure, there's a ton of work to be done in game development, but that's my job, right? I know that many people in the industry have to do exactly the same. So what's my problem?

Well, since we decided within Sega to break the company down into divisions, our everyday life has changed dramatically. You know the story by now: every AM or CS team (well, almost every one) became a company in its own right. Mine, as you know, is called Amusement Vision.

Still, all of the companies are owned in majority by Sega, which is understandable. Anyway, I think I spoke about this a while ago, but as soon as I became CEO of Amusement Vision, I had to rethink my job. It is no longer simply about videogames, developing videogames. No, suddenly, it is all about business. Particularly in recent months, Sega's internal organisation has been completely reshaped because so many CEOs of these small companies (former AM teams) have found themselves having to participate more deeply into Sega's everyday life management.

I don't want to appear silly but I used to come in to work late, well, after 11am anyway. Now, imagine, I have to wake up very early, go straight to Sega's Headquarters and work on the business side of things. Some of the biggest names in Sega have had even bigger responsibilities placed upon them. Sometimes this has meant they have had to quit their former position to assume an even more key position inside the group, as Yu Suzuki-san did. So yes, sure, there are people even busier than I am. But learning the business side while trying to meet the deadline for one of Sega's most important titles of the year, the first game on Tri-Force, and the first time we've worked so closely with Nintendo… learning from each other is great but it requires some attention, and a great deal of work.

So when I always say that I'm so busy, I'm not trying to be arrogant. It is quite something: working at the top level of Sega, learning business and managing my own company, developing *F-Zero* with Nintendo for the arcade and GameCube. You can understand why I've had to rethink the amount of time I can devote to this column.

Anyway, I will stop talking about Sega because there are even more important subjects happening in the world. I would like to put videogames aside and speak about something which is very important to me at this time: war. Just as I'm sure it is all around the world, the conflict with Iraq is the main news on television here. But what is most surprising to me is the other war, the war that's taking place inside the media.

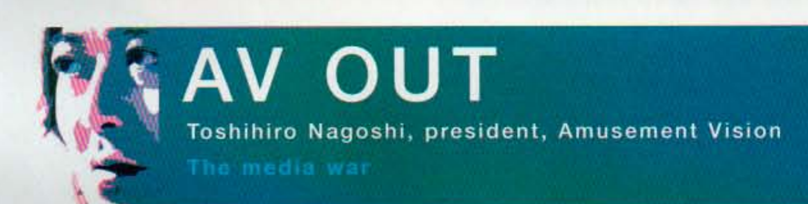
Every publication, every TV channel spends so much of their time assessing and debating the advantages and weaknesses for both the Coalition and Iraq. Over here, opinion is divided. Every branch of each form of media has its own view, and its own way of doing this. But the moment that completely astonished me was when, glancing at the TV, I saw some realtime footage broadcast from the top of a Coalition tank rolling into Iraq as the war began. Clearly we live in incredible times. It's funny that, even though I'm busy working at the cutting edge of technology, it takes a poor-resolution picture on my TV screen to make me realise this. I've even been told that a site exists on the Web where you can actually see all of this sort of coverage in realtime. I guess that's pleasurable to some hardcore war fanatics. But I wondered that if the Iraqi military was able to watch them too, would this not be a tactical problem for the Coalition forces? Or is this not a problem after all?

My final thought was that this was all a complicated trap the Coalition had made, where it would broadcast online videos of some part of Iraq while concentrating its advance in another, luring the enemy. Mmm… it's interesting. There is so much information, I really don't know what to believe.

There is a personal connection here, since the father of my wife is in the US navy. He has a position on the carrier Kitty Hawk. Coincidentally, he retired some three months before the war began. What if the war had begun sooner? Well, he would be somewhere near Iraq, I suppose, and it's quite possible I might have seen him on one of these television shows for the 'hardcore'. It's ironic, because during this conflict, we have been flooded with footage of the high-tech war going on. In a way this constant stream of media removes the reality from the situation. Even though we are following the action in realtime, it feels more like a videogame than ever. We are so close to the experience, it appears so real, but at the same time we're detached, so far, so indifferent to it. But whatever the media can do to erase the smell of blood, the reality is filled with lives being lost every day this war lasts. This is very disturbing to me.

I really hope this ends quickly. Every day counts. I pray this conflict will have ended by the time this column gets printed. See you!





AV OUT

Toshihiro Nagoshi, president, Amusement Vision

The media war

"We have been flooded with footage of the war going on. It appears so real, but at the same time we're detached, so far, so indifferent to it"

Toshihiro Nagoshi is president of Amusement Vision, formerly Sega subsidiary Soft R&D #4



BIFFOVISION

Page 28, press hold, and reveal. 'Digitiser's founder speaks out

The games industry can eat shit and die

We all know what coprophagy is, right? It's a Greek word meaning 'to eat shit'. Interestingly, I once heard a tale about a rock guitarist who, for a bet, had attempted to eat shit. Apparently, as it had already been through a digestive system, his saliva had trouble breaking it down. So it was near impossible to swallow, and he ended up having to pick it out of his teeth, and scrape it off his tongue with a guitar pick (apologies if you were eating a Snickers while reading the above).

What has such vivid imagery got to do with the world of videogames? On one level, nothing. To the best of my knowledge, few of us are happy to scoff human waste. Unfortunately, that doesn't mean that we're not force-fed recycled, reheated shit with alarming regularity. And when you eat poo, it's going to come out the other end sooner or later. And, alas, there always seems to be somebody ready with the knife and fork, and the cycle begins anew.

We can all complain about how unoriginal the industry is until we're blue in the chest. But the fact is that a multitude of unoriginal sins could be forgiven if only designers displayed a smidgen of original thinking. I'm not even talking about gameplay; sometimes I do want to know that I'm going to feel at home with my thirdperson, 3D platform game. Sometimes I want that familiar button layout, that same old collect-100-objects-to-get-a-new-life mechanic. Similar types of games are often going to play similarly. If Capcom suddenly presented us with a radical reinvention of the *Resident Evil* franchise, I'd probably shriek into my shoe.

What I'm talking about is the worlds these games inhabit, and the characters who inhabit them. Why must all of them feature a checklist of gaming's greatest hits? If I witness another exploding barrel (do real barrels explode if you hit them with a stick? And how often do you see a barrel in real life anyway?), or another mine cart, or another door that opens only if you push a huge granite cube onto a switch, I'm going to stab myself in the face.

If you're going to be unoriginal at least disguise it. Make the mine kart a big roller skate, or the exploding barrel a giant moth strapped with dynamite or something. Please! Is it really that difficult? Do you really think our memories only extend to the past couple of weeks, and we'll forget the last time we jumped across a lake of lava? We're not goldfish, people! We're people!

With but a few exceptions, films all follow the same structure. Yet what filmmakers have become adept at is hiding the three-act template that films must adhere to. Imagine if every film Hollywood produced was set in Leeds, and featured half a dozen or so identical scenes in which the main characters, who all wore identical blue jumpsuits, discussed skin care products.

Sure, there are only about four stories in the world when you boil them down to the basics, and all that, but at least Hollywood scriptwriters are smart enough to hide the fact that they're cribbing from their predecessors (unless they're the two gents who did 'Godzilla'/'Independence Day'/'Stargate', who might as well have named their company 'We Really Like George Lucas and Steven Spielberg Films Ltd').

We're currently in the midst of a platform game resurgence, and so all the old clichés are being marched out with tedious regularity: snow levels, levels with Aztec-esque ruins, those poxy lava levels, underground flipping caverns by the ton… even the sublimely structured and otherwise brilliant *Metroid Prime* is riddled with these same clichés. Heck, it even lifts *Half-Life*'s hooked tentacles, and *Resi*'s giant plant thing. It's like the time a decade ago when every single side-on platform game had to have a level where you were arsing about on the roof of a train – and it's getting worse. For me the final straw was the rolling barrels in the risible *Star Fox Adventures*; a homage to *Donkey Kong*, or the low watermark of this industry's imagination?

Without wanting to sound like an old fart, back in the '80s we had games starring murderous infants (*Jack the Nipper*), cheeky schoolboys (*Skooldaze*), and hell-spitting camels (thank you, Mr Minter), set anywhere from a curiously domestic nightmare world (*Pyjamarama*), or Thatcher's Britain (*Urban Upstart*), to a sprawling mansion set on the morning after a grand piss-up (*Jet Set Willy*). But even recent history has displayed moments of genius. It's easy to take Sonic's chequerboard, pinball world for granted, but back at the dawn of the '90s it was truly unique.

"If gamers are forced to take the same trip to over-familiar locales, sooner or later we're going to stop getting on the bus in the first place"

We're all blessed with imaginations. Within us all there's a child who was once capable of turning a dining table into a fort, or a branch into a gun, or a pillow into a sentient cloud-friend called Mr Nimbus. So it pains this writer to see so many imaginations reclining, dormant and rusty, in their owners' brainpans. Heck, why spend a couple of extra hours trying to come up with a few new ideas when you can just cobble together something from what's gone before, right? Why expend any time and energy trying to come up with your own concepts, when plenty of guys have already done so and – suckers – made their ideas available for all to see?

Once upon a time every videogame was a window on a new world. Oh, sure, back in the '80s we had countless inexplicable 'tributes' to *Donkey Kong*, and your subtly re-named *Space Invaders* and *Pac-Man* rip-offs (*Mr Puck*, *The Invaders*, *Astro Wars*, et al). But every game that mattered – and there were scores of them – did something different. Nowadays, the games that we're told should matter are the ones with the most hype, or the ones with a licence – not the ones displaying the most evidence of an original imagination.

See, something weird happened back in the mid-'90s; the games industry started feeding upon itself. There's a Native American legend about a snake – Oroboros – that did much the same thing. Nobody knows why. Perhaps it was an idiot.

It's crucial to the survival of the industry that developers start working harder, and being in less of a hurry to get down the pub during the early days of a project's life. If gamers are forced to take the same trip to over-familiar locales, sooner or later we're going to stop getting on the bus in the first place.

Developers: before you start working, hide your consoles for a month. Go to the cinema. Read some books. Watch kids' TV. Look at the illustrated abdomens of tattooed fun fair workers. Forget every game you ever played, and draw your inspiration from elsewhere. Dig deeper. There are tasty treats to be found in places other than Shigeru's toilet.

Mr Biffo is a semi-retired videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with **Edge***'s*

Edge's most wanted

Half-Life 2

It's the sequel to one of the best firstperson shooters. It's the sequel to one of the best firstperson shooters. It's the sequel to – what else do you need to know?



(PC) TBC

Viewtiful Joe

Capcom's recent financial difficulties make its decision to create games like *Viewtiful Joe* admirably generous. Let's hope videogamers respond in kind.



(GameCube) Capcom

Transformers

Actual gameplay details are still thin on the ground. But it's got *Transformers* in it. So how can it possibly be anything less than stunningly, joyously brilliant?



(PlayStation2) Takara

Fire Warrior

First Climax and now Kuju have brought out the geeky nerd in **Edge**, and consequently we're dusting off our lead miniatures with excited anticipation.



(PlayStation2) THQ

This is hardcore

But what's wrong with moving mainstream?

This article was originally going to be about the imminent introduction of *Half-Life 2*: exactly how will a game that set an unparalleled benchmark for firstperson gaming by the skilful use of scripted set-pieces, adapt to a world that seems to have shifted, via the likes of *Deus Ex* and *Halo*, towards reliance on *unscripted* set-pieces? But then came the Easter weekend and ITV's 'Game Stars' show. Or more specifically, then came the all too predictable reaction from hardcore gamers to the show. Internet forums were quickly awash with vitriol: how *dare* TV producers sully our hobby with cliché, and how dare they know less than us about games?

Clearly there were a number of things about 'Game Stars' that could have been changed for the better. Some of the male presenter's 'gags', for example, or the rather loose definitions of the award categories. Or even just not having Lara Croft appear from the ceiling at the start of the show. But while videogames continue to be marginalised on TV schedules, and while they continue to be subject to regulatory straitjacketing, 'Game Stars' provided some excellent foundations upon which the show can be improved, building interest in it and videogames in the future.

Rather predictably, however, the instant reaction from most dedicated gamers was one of cynicism and vitriol. But, to return to *Half-Life 2*, one of the most eagerly awaited sequels in the short history of videogaming, it's a lamentable fact that news of its forthcoming release will barely register beyond the tiny handful of ardent gamers – the dot within a dot, to paraphrase Sony's Phil Harrison. The arrival of *Half-Life 2* ought to be an occasion where we shout about our hobby from the rooftops; where we attempt to encourage others to try out videogaming for themselves, so that they too can benefit from the unparalleled joy that only games can provide.

This is, unfortunately, unlikely to happen. Rather than attempting to educate their casual gaming peers, far too many hardcore gamers are content to condemn them, for ignorance, or indifference, or for having different gaming tastes. The reaction to 'Game Stars' is indicative of the continued unwillingness of the hardcore community to accept the great unwashed. But everybody deserves to know about games like *Half-Life 2*. And that's not going to happen until we're happy to let them know.





030



032

034



036



039

Powerdrome (PC, Xbox, PS2) p030

Hidden & Dangerous 2 (PC) p032

Between Good & Evil (PS2, PC, Xbox, GC) p034

Fire Warrior (PC, PS2) p036

Broken Sword III: The Sleeping Dragon (PC, PS2, Xbox) p037

Dinosaur Movie-Maker (PC, Xbox, PS2) p038

Chibirobo (GC) p038

Ice Nine (PS2) p039

Catan (PS2, PC) p039

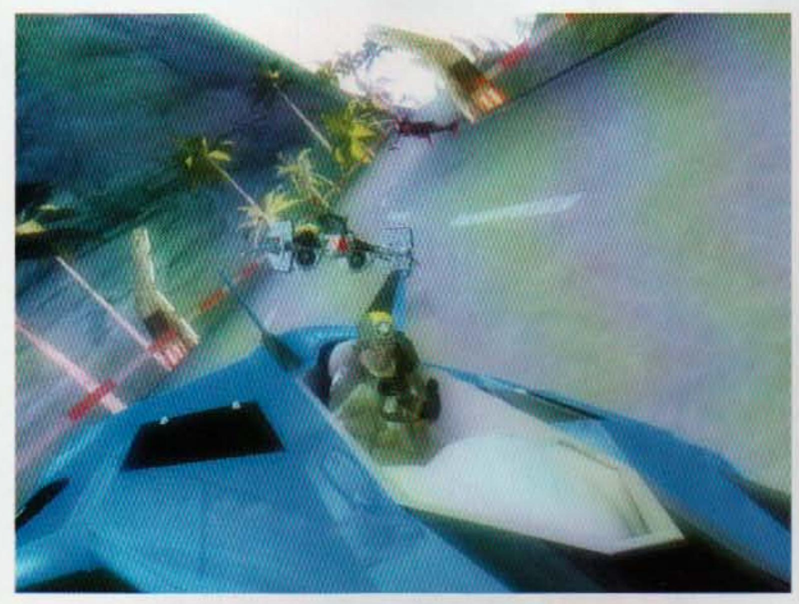
Prescreen Alphas (various) p041

Carve (Xbox) p042

Half-Life 2 (PC) p048

Powerdrome

Flights of fancy were inconceivable before Powerdrome appeared on the ST and Amiga. Get prepared for its blistering return



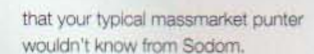
The designers want you to feel an emotional attachment to your racer, and each character has a 'pilot personality'. Replays emphasise all the near misses and aggravation you've caused during the race





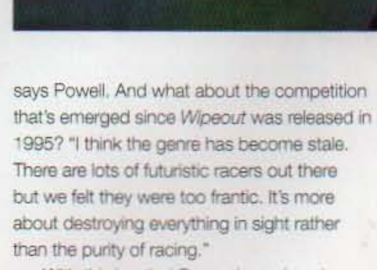
Stunt Car Racer, Sabre Wulf, OutRun, Shinobi, Altered Beast and now Powerdrome. What's going on? Just as **Edge** thought publishers were intent on dismissing the past – apart from those dreadfully cynical '20 Greatest Arctic Games of All Time!' packages – resurrection seems to be back in fashion. And apart from *OutRun*, these are not your 'classic' franchises, but videogames that your typical massmarket punter wouldn't know from Sodom.

"There'll be no weapons, 'it's all about hitting the right line and challenging yourself to shave seconds off your best lap time'"



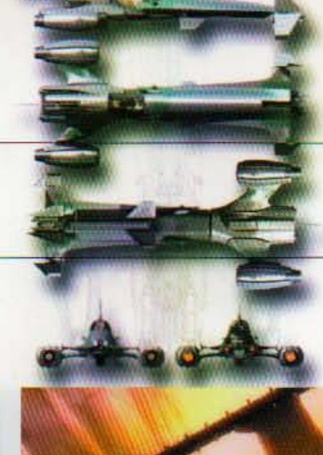
Powerdrome certainly has a certain cachet among mature gamers and it inspired a particular Psygnosis title that is often touted as the game that made PlayStation cool. Fans can be assured that the purity that made *Powerdrome* so cherished – at least among those who dedicated the time necessary to complete one lap without crashing off a wall – has been retained for this update. Notably, the mind behind *Powerdrome*, **Michael Powell**, is directing this project.

"I've had requests over the years to bring back *Powerdrome* in some form but I didn't want to do it until the technology was right," says Powell. And what about the competition that's emerged since *Wipeout* was released in 1995? "I think the genre has become stale. There are lots of futuristic racers out there but we felt they were too frantic. It's more about destroying everything in sight rather than the purity of racing."



With this in mind *Powerdrome* is going back to its roots. There'll be no weapons and you will only master the game if you adopt a good race strategy and stick to the smoothest racing lines. Accordingly the tracks have been designed to suit players who enjoy precision and a technical challenge over the quick thrill of dispatching an enemy with a missile up the tailpipe. This new *Powerdrome* is unlikely to be as exacting as the old one, but you won't be able to get away with the bump and grind evident in games such as *Quantum Redshift*.

Already the game runs at a phenomenal speed. It's a statement you'll have found ascribed to every futuristic racer since *Wipeout*, but this next-gen *Powerdrome* really is blistering. The sensation of velocity is partly down to the slick framerate, but is also enhanced by the terrific sound effects that accompany your progress. Points have been chosen in arenas and environments which emit sounds and as your craft passes these sectors the noises boom and reverberate to give it that pod racer quality.



Format: **Xbox, PC**
Publisher: **TBC**
Developer: **Argonaut Software Sheffield**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **TBC**







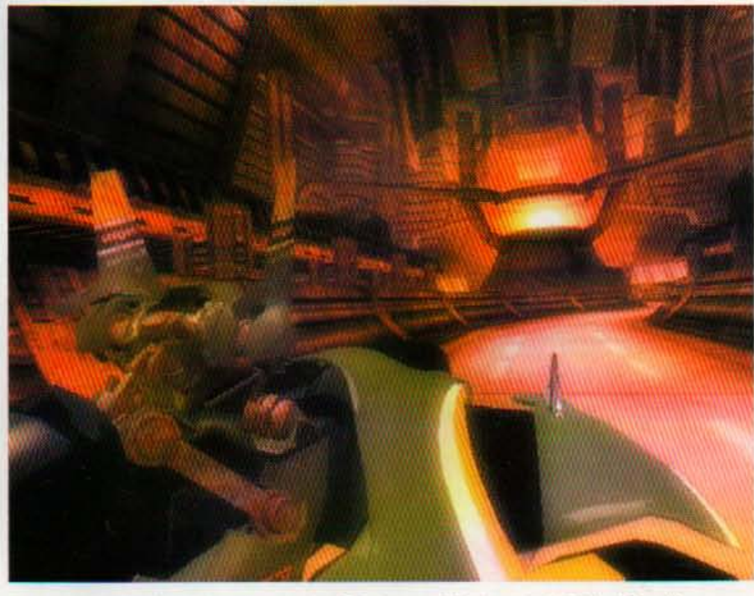




Don't expect courses with over-elaborate sections; although some of the later stages require intense concentration to navigate you'll find that most of the courses have been designed with speed in mind. Indeed the first course is modelled on your typical IndyCar oval. "It's all about hitting the right line and challenging yourself to shave seconds off your best lap time," adds Powell.

Players are also able to trigger a limited speed boost, adding a tactical element to the racing. This is currently being balanced but when your craft reaches top velocity a screen blur effect further warps your senses. Damage features in the game, but Powell wants players to feel as if they always have a chance to win the race. Hulls can crack and smoke will billow from your engine, though there's always the opportunity to take a pit stop during every lap. Powell is even considering including fuel consumption, especially for the endurance races.

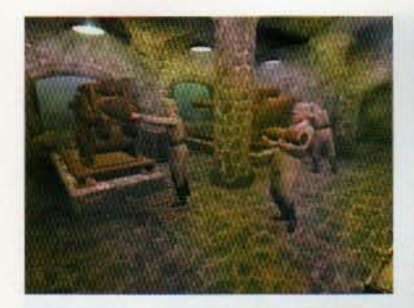
As you'd expect, there's a number of craft and characters to choose from and each ship has its peculiar handling characteristics. One of six characters can be selected at the outset, though a further six can be unlocked after completing tournaments. The *Powerdrome* brand may not have much clout away from UK shores, but for those who cut their teeth on early-'90s home computing, this will be a welcome return.



There are too many futuristic racers around so Edge is especially pleased that Michael Powell has decided to remain true to the purity of the original. Weapons won't help you win, only controlled racing

Hidden & Dangerous 2

Missing in action for over two years, Illusion Softworks' WWII sequel looks set for a final developmental push







Don't expect open-field combat to be a staple: SAS-style operations such as eliminating artillery are *Hidden & Dangerous 2*'s stock in trade



Big-name PC sequels have a habit of slipping off the industry's release radar and wandering off into development wilderness. *Duke Nukem Forever* is the, by now, tragi-comic apogee of this phenomenon, but *Hidden & Dangerous 2* isn't far behind. Shortly after the rapturous reception of the original in mid-1999, developer Illusion Softworks announced the sequel, prematurely revealing features and content which have since been cut. Now, finally emerging from the development fog, *Hidden & Dangerous 2* has much to prove on the PC battlefield.

"Illusion Softworks has the spark of creativity to offer the sort of design that will keep us coming back for more online soldiering"

After two years of radio silence, the game is just now starting to materialise in a playable form. The original's ground-breaking, but simple, format of four-man WWII squad action has since been copied dozens of times, so Illusion is fighting for innovation once more. No longer does the game feature a central hero, story arc and that hero's Nazi nemesis, but *Hidden & Dangerous 2* will more closely resemble the original than we might like.

There are seven brief campaigns scattered across the battlefields of WWII, ranging from the desert environs of North Africa to the snowy wastes of the Arctic; 23 missions in total are promised. Illusion claims that the missions themselves are inspired by real-life SAS missions during the conflict – the regiment itself being formed in 1941.

Technologically, *Hidden & Dangerous 2* remains impressive despite an already lengthy development cycle. The intriguingly named LS3D engine – also used for Illusion's *Mafia*, released last year – allows for impressive detail and large environments. More importantly for mission design, though, it allows for a wide range of controllable vehicles. With more than a nod to the online phenomenon of *Battlefield 1942*, players have the option of leaping into tanks, jeeps, mobile artillery units, armoured personnel carriers and perhaps even aircraft as one route to achieving their goals.

The original format of *Hidden & Dangerous* is largely unchanged: 30 highly skilled soldiers form a pool of manpower from whom you must pick a four-man team. Given the specific goals of the mission – capture, rescue, demolish, assault – certain soldiers come to the fore, as each has attributes which will make them more or less useful in

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Take 2**
Developer: **Illusion Softworks**
Origin: **Czech Republic**
Release: **Autumn**

Previously in **E**123









Illusion Softworks' own LS3D engine seems equally at home indoors and out. We've already seen, in last year's *Mafia* (which premiered this engine), that it can handle convincing vehicle physics with aplomb

certain situations. Heavy equipment is best carried by a strong, high-endurance grunt, for example, while a sniper will be invaluable in open, enemy-packed territory. Pleasingly for those of us sick of WWII games dominated by US troops, *Hidden & Dangerous 2* features a broad mixture of Allies to pick from, including some from countries that played smaller parts in the war. Interestingly, word has it that your soldiers gradually develop and improve over the course of the game, but it's not yet clear how.

While the missions are only 'based upon' historical actions and real places, purists can rest assured that weapons and vehicles are historically accurate. The originally awe-inspiring list of included armaments has been scaled back to a more modest arsenal, but still includes period favourites such as the German MP40 and British Sten and Enfield, plus pistols, knives, sniper and standard rifles, heavy machine-guns, rocket-launchers, grenades and a flamethrower. Weapons dropped by fallen enemies can be picked up and used, which will prove particularly useful if you're none too careful with ammunition.

The *Battlefield 1942* influence comes to the fore again in the planned multiplayer options. The most promising is entitled Skirmish and simply demands that two teams of players achieve conflicting goals: nothing we haven't seen before, but our feeling is that Illusion has the spark of creativity to offer the sort of design that will keep you coming back for more online soldiering. That happy knack of design will have to extend to the whole game, though, for *Hidden & Dangerous 2* to stand head and shoulders above a market filled with similar titles. But perhaps Illusion has only itself to blame for that.



Variety is key: expect more than in the original, with operations taking place in North Africa and all over Europe – even as far north as the Arctic. Equipment, vehicles and uniforms will reflect this

Czech up

Games development is a relatively new industry in most of Eastern Europe, and this is particularly true in the case of the Czech Republic. However, *H&D*'s global success has caused Illusion's studio to swell and others to appear as off-shoots – especially Pterodon, notable for the recent *Vietcong* (see p102). Bohemia (*Operation Flashpoint*) and Altar (*UFO: Aftermath*) also contribute to the Czech Republic's cultural exports.

Between Good & Evil

A rebellion is brewing in the peculiar world of Hyllia. Edge travels to Paris expecting some non-conformist gameplay from the man who brought us Rayman







The hovercraft is the first vehicle you get to pilot, but more are promised. Following a recent trend, Ancel's title mixes different game styles together

Describing a game's plot at length is something **Edge** tries to avoid. But it doesn't really pose a problem for *Between Good & Evil* because the game's utterly barmy. We've played the first two hours, but we're still not sure where it's going. This is not a bad thing, and to some extent it's predictable, as the title does come from **Michel Ancel**, the mind behind *Rayman*. So let's talk about The Game.

The Game is how Ancel wants us to think about his work. He's not interested in how many levels there are, how many vehicles you can pilot and which genre his creation fits into. As a result *BG&E* cannot be categorised. There are adventure game components, hovercraft sections, trading, a *Pokémon Snap*-style collection element, a flying vehicle to pilot and thirdperson combat.

Fusing so many genres together is ambitious, but not wholly original. *Haven: Call of the King* didn't quite mange to pull it off simply because too many of the sub-sections were weaker than the core game. Current evidence suggests that *Between Good & Evil* hangs together more convincingly and while it may not do one thing perfectly, it does several with style and conviction.

Predominantly, however, the game asks you to take heroine Jade on a mission to restore peace to her troubled planet of Hyllia. Thirdperson combat and puzzle solving appear in equal measure. In fact, while Charles Cecil is bringing the point 'n' click adventure up to date with *Broken Sword III* (see p37) it might be said that Ancel has already got there. The puzzles are imaginative and varied enough to hold your interest, at least for the demo **Edge** has played, and are localised to key areas. There's no pushing blocks around or ferrying objects over vast distances. A pig sidekick adds further variety. He can help you reach platforms with his fart-powered boots (at least the German journalists enjoyed this humour) and perform a bounce attack that triggers a number of events to help solve puzzles and kill enemies.

Indeed the characterisation is very much animal based, and some of the Jamaican voice acting is stereotypical enough to make even George Lucas cringe. Environments are sumptuous and retain the Gallic charm evident in Ancel's previous games. But in some respects the designer wanted to go back to basics. "I fondly remember many

"I fondly remember many older 3D games like Starglider and Mercenary. It was a time when imagination was more important than realism"

Format: **PS2, Xbox, GC, PC**
Publisher: **Ubi Soft**
Developer: **In-house (Studio Montpellier)**
Origin: **France**
Release: **Winter**

Previously in **E**112









older 3D games like *Starglider* and *Mercenary*. It was a time when imagination was more important than creating something realistic. I want players to be able to enter this world and be able to explore its limits."

While not offering the kind of freedom of *Vice City*, *BG&E*'s world gradually unfurls as tasks are completed until you can eventually navigate its seas with a hovercraft and its skies with an aircraft. These are not bolted-on sections, as in *Star Fox*, but have been integrated with some delicacy. Surveying the gameworld from high above the clouds is particularly inspiring.

Sub-games include hovercraft racing and collecting snaps of indigenous lifeforms with your camera. Do well and you can win credits for powerups, energy tokens and objects to help in the quests you are given. In one quest for instance you need to take a picture of some rare animals in an underground lair. To do this you need to acquire a zoom lens.

BG&E also fits together effectively as a working world. Shoot other innocent vehicles from your hovercraft and the police will hunt you down and deliver a fine. Just how well the credit system balances out can't be gauged at this stage but there appear to be plenty of ways to earn money.

There are still doubts over whether Ancel's latest world will be completely coherent, but *Between Good & Evil*'s is certainly charming and different.





Hyllia's bars (above left) give you an opportunity to mix with a diverse range of species. The bar game doesn't advance the plot, but it's another example of the game's working world pretensions

Fire Warrior

Format: **PS2, PC**
Publisher: **THQ**
Developer: **Kuju Entertainment**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Summer**

Previously in **E**121

Tau about a bit of tabletop wargaming writ large? That's what Kuju and Games Workshop hope to provide



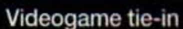








One aspect of *Fire Warrior* that these screenshots can't convey is the atmospheric audio. As well as an impressive voice cast including the likes of Tom Baker, Brian Blessed and Burt Kwouk, a lot of work has also been devoted to capturing the essence of the wargame with atmospheric and appropriate battlefield sounds





Fans of the 'Warhammer 40,000' tabletop wargame might yearn for the chance to play the part of one of the Emperor's finest Space Marines in a videogame, but, contrary to early speculation, this isn't it. Instead, *Fire Warrior* casts players as a member of a race that's only recently been introduced to Games Workshop's sci-fi setting: the titular Fire Warrior is a Tau warrior named Kais. The game's first level represents his 'Trial by Fire', and the game itself spans the ensuing 24 hours, spread over 17 levels.

Since the Tau are in the process of discovering the gothic splendours of the fantasy-flavoured 'WH40K' universe for themselves, the game serves as a voyage of discovery for gamers who haven't experienced the joys of the tabletop game firsthand, and provides die-hard fans with an unexpected shift in perspective. Thus, over the course of his travails, Kais fights a variety of races and organisations, starting with the Imperial Guard and building up to Space Marines from the Raptor and Ultramarine chapters before, halfway through, a plot twist brings in another, more ominous enemy. Kuju remains tight-lipped about the nature of this threat, but it's bound to be either the forces of Chaos or the relentless Tyranid hordes.

But Kuju isn't restricting its inspiration to the original 'Warhammer 40,000'. Indeed, although the design team doesn't exactly boast the most illustrious firstperson shooting heritage, it has been keen to emphasise the influences that it's drawn from several seminal console shooters. So from *TimeSplitters* is taken the basic solidity of the engine and a fourplayer splitscreen mode (although PC owners will benefit from up to 16 players over a LAN). *Medal of Honor*, meanwhile, provides the inspiration from the atmospheric recreation of battlefield conditions; so in-game music is out, in favour of overhead artillery barrages and the general hubbub of war. And, of course, there's *Halo*, from which *Fire Warrior* borrows its recharging shield system, and the tactical imposition of only being able to carry two weapons at a time.

The first couple of levels provide ample demonstration of these influences in action, and bode well for the finished game, since although trench warfare against Imperial commissars is initially reminiscent of the linearity and slightly basic AI of *Medal of Honor*, a certain amount of emergent design soon becomes apparent. And if the game does deliver on its promise, there may yet be hope for a Space Marine sequel.

Videogame tie-in

Interestingly, the process of utilising the rich 'Warhammer 40,000' universe to create a videogame tie-in has fed back into the ongoing development of the tabletop game. Thus the need for a more powerful sniper rifle in the videogame has translated into a new addition to the tabletop Tau armoury, along with a new type of dropship. And, never one to rest on its merchandising laurels, Games Workshop will be following the videogame up with a novel and toy tie-in.







Broken Sword III: The Sleeping Dragon

Format: **PS2, Xbox, PC**
Publisher: **THQ**
Developer: **Revolution**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **October**

Previously in **E110**, **E116**

How do you solve a problem like a plane crash? With a bottle of beer, a crate and an unconscious pilot

According to Revolution's Charles Cecil, one of the reasons for the lengthy wait between *Broken Sword* chapters is that he didn't want to start work on a sequel until it was possible to create 3D environments to match the visual elegance of the 2D backdrops featured in the first two games in the series. He certainly seems to have picked his moment: this game is, quite simply, amazingly beautiful. The brightly coloured, cartoonish aesthetic is sublime, with polish provided by a breathtakingly lifelike lighting system, which generates the colour of shadows based on the colour of the light creating them, and light maps based on levels of radiosity bestowing remarkably subtle depths of hue.

But apart from the need to create a visually compelling title, another pressing need is that the essential mechanics and 'grammar' of *Broken Sword* gameplay will be sustained through the transition towards three dimensions. Indeed if there were any fears that the successful formula of the original games was to be dispensed with, the game's first puzzle rids any lingering doubts. Starting, as the other chapters did, in medias res, the game's plucky protagonist, George Stobbart finds himself inside a downed plane that's hanging precariously over the edge of a cliff. With just a bottle of beer, a crate, and an unconscious pilot to interact with, George needs to get out of the plane pretty sharpish – without it toppling over the edge.

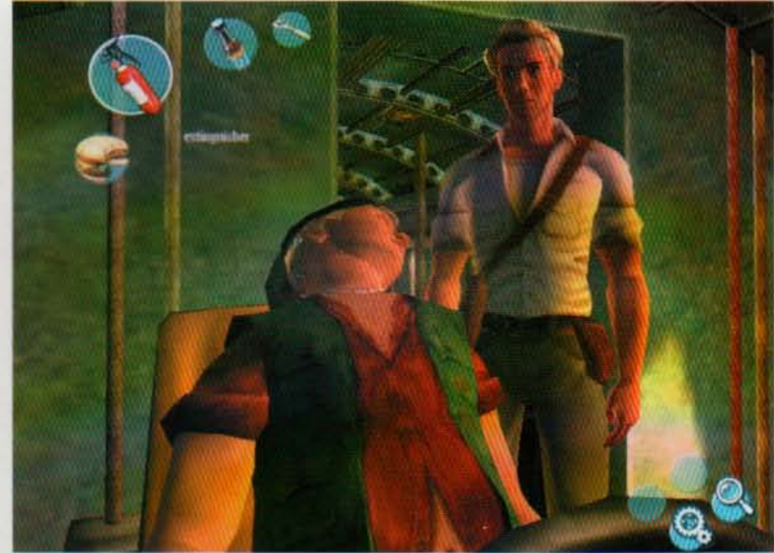
Fortunately, if players do get stuck, there's a hint system in place, and in any case, there are plenty of scenes and puzzles that are directly evocative of sequences in the previous *Broken Sword* games, so fans of the series should be fine. One new addition that they'll have to learn to cope with, however, are block shifting puzzles, which escalate in difficulty over the course of the game.

Aside from the puzzles, one of the great strengths of Revolution's approach to three dimensions is that those breathtaking visuals, and a facial animation system that allows the convincing depiction of emotions, enable the plot to be revealed through gameplay sections, rather than relying on non-interactive cut-scenes. Which allows the developer to wield its exhaustive knowledge of narrative exposition with immense subtlety, using a variety of techniques drawn from other mediums to vary the pace and generate emotional response from players. Thus, Cecil is as happy quoting well-established rules of cinematic editing such as 'crossing the line', as he is discussing the more novelistic technique of switching between characters at dramatic moments.

Which augurs well for a new chapter that takes creative risks without alienating its hardcore legion of fans.











These three PlayStation2 shots (above, right) are pretty indistinguishable from the PC version (rest of page); both versions are lovely to look at





The Sleeping Dragon looks like it might manage the remarkable feat of adhering to the themes and mechanics that have made previous episodes so well-loved, and yet also updating them to cater for current tastes and technology standards

Dinosaur Movie-Maker (working title)

Format: PC, Xbox, PS2
Publisher: TBC
Developer: Legba
Origin: UK
Release: Spring 2004

Forget historical accuracy, if mixing filmmaking with extinct animals is fun, then who are we to complain?





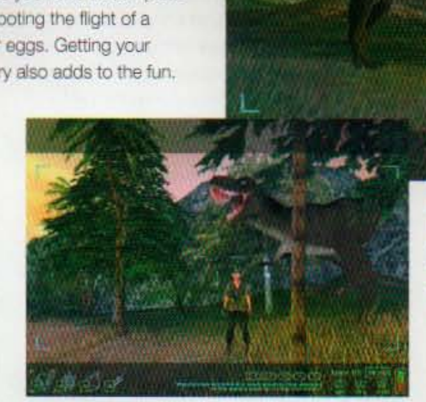
Legba will be hoping that interest in the Jurassic period is still strong, though its VirtualTV package is versatile enough to cover many more subjects

While the premise may not be startlingly new, you have to wonder why no one's thought of doing it this way before. Even Jon Hare, consultant on the game, admits that it's a cross between *Pokémon Snap* and a management game. In short, your task is to make films of dinosaurs in their natural habitat.

Starting off as a cash strapped producer/director you must make the best flick you can and hopefully turn a profit. Your reward is work on even more ambitious projects. The game sets you free on a dinosaur-infested island and from a firstperson perspective you have to complete several tasks. These range from framing and shooting the flight of a pterodactyl to capturing images of rare dinosaur eggs. Getting your presenter to avoid death and supply commentary also adds to the fun.

Once all the footage is in the can you go into post-production where a number of editing features allow you to clean up the film and make it presentable. The film is then assessed for its merit, added extras and quality of footage.

Dinosaur Movie-Maker (just a working title, thankfully) is the first project for Legba's VirtualTV technology, and Hare promises that more diverse games and products will take advantage of its versatility. The game will be doing the rounds at E3.



It's possible to manipulate the dinosaurs to a limited degree. Throwing meat in their direction, for instance, may generate a good photo opportunity. If your presenter gets a little too close to the action he could get mauled. But, then, all footage is valuable...

Chibirobo

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Bandai
Developer: Skip
Origin: Japan
Release: June (Japan), TBC (UK)

One of Japan's newest and most unusual studios has a playful take on the mech genre

Not content with subverting the RPG through forthcoming GameCube title, *Giftpia* (see **E**122), offbeat newcomer Skip has now turned its extraordinary vision to... well, miniature robot sims. *Chibirobo* – small robot in Japanese – puts you in control of a 10cm mech created by a scientist whose goal is to produce robots capable of emotion. When the scientist is taken prisoner – by jealous business rivals perhaps – it's up to your mini-robot to rescue him. Sort of 'Toy Story 2' meets 'Pinocchio' with a dash of 'Bladerunner' (remember JF Sebastion's AI toys?) thrown in.

As the screens show, the world of *Chibirobo* is one of giant domestic locations, drawn in that attractively bright, faintly nostalgic Pixar-style. Little is known about the gameplay yet, but it appears that the robot must navigate the house and find where his creator is being held. Along the way, he'll have to regularly recharge by plugging himself into the mains. There's also a fourplayer mode, although who knows what form this'll take. Is this just a standard 3D platformer given a kooky narrative spin, or a real design innovation? With fare as attractively designed and bravely non-commercial as this (no film, TV or manga licence here), the question seems to fade into insignificance.



While the cute robot model is deliberately simple, the background detail is exquisite. Check out the 'Cambell' soup tins (above). Does that cute desk lamp (left) suggest a Pixar influence?





Part of the challenge of the game is navigating over-sized household objects. Could this finally be a robot version of 'The Borrowers'?

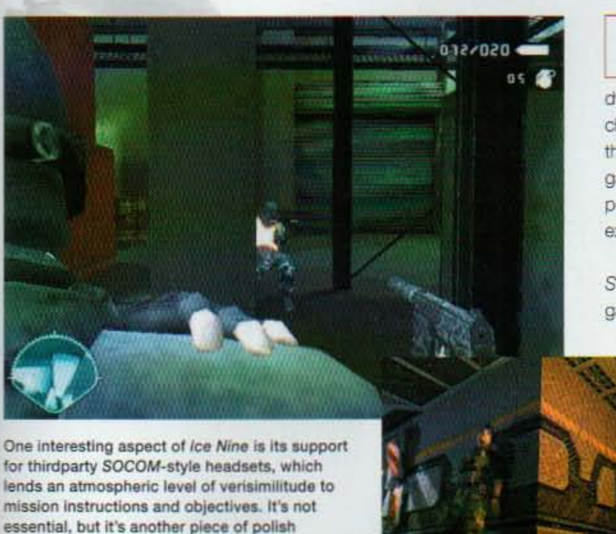
Ice Nine



Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Bam! Entertainment**
Developer: **Torus**
Origin: **Australia**
Release: **Q3**

Previously in **E**120

Nothing to do with Kurt Vonnegut apparently. Although surely the notion of a rapidly devastating virus called 'Ice Nine' is too much of a coincidence?



One interesting aspect of *Ice Nine* is its support for thirdparty *SOCOM*-style headsets, which lends an atmospheric level of verisimilitude to mission instructions and objectives. It's not essential, but it's another piece of polish

The last time *Ice Nine* graced these pages, much was made of the influences exerted by *Deux Ex* and 'The X-Files' on the game. As you'd expect, these are still intact, in the shape of a dynamically branching storyline offering the capacity to make moral choices, and a conspiracy-laden plot respectively. But a recent demo of the game's early levels has afforded another opportunity to evaluate the game's potential and things are looking good. The game engine is polished by PlayStation2 standards and the experience of the game's executive producer working on *Splinter Cell* is also apparent.

One novel twist is that Torus intends to provide support for *SOCOM*-style headsets – despite the fact that *Ice Nine* is a singleplayer game. Although you'll be able to receive mission communications from your off-site team of advisors without such a headset, if you have got one it will certainly add to the sense of participating in subterfuge and special ops as orders and information are barked into your earpiece.

Also neat, is the PDA which provides data updates as well as transforming into a weapon. Throw in some fairly decent AI, disguises, human shields and ragdoll physics over the course of 12 large missions, and it's looking pretty positive for the latest stealth-based firstperson shooter.





Ragdoll physics complement some solidly realised environments which players need to negotiate with stealth over 12 large missions

Catan

Format: **PS2, PC**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Summer (Japan), TBC (UK)**

Capcom has found an exciting new way to tempt PS2 gamers online... it's giving its games away free





Players will be able to indulge in dialogue (top) via the keyboard. The hexagonal display (above) betrays the title's board game origins



Up to four players can participate in each game. They'll be able to pick and customise different characters, possibly buying new accessories with Capcom's in-game currency earned through play



Whether the platform is console, PC or mobile phone, the key to multiplayer gaming, at least where publishers are concerned, is how to make money out of it. One publisher currently taking this puzzle seriously in Japan is Capcom. *Catan*, inspired by a German board game, has four players taking on the roles of colonists fighting for land and resources on a small island. Not remarkable in itself, of course, but the innovative factor here is that Capcom will allow players to download the game for free. This initial version works for a limited period of time – after that you have to start paying a monthly subscription fee, expected to be somewhere in the region of ¥200 (£1).

As you'd expect, Capcom is promising to reward regular players. Through spending time in the game and achieving success it's possible to earn Catan money which can be used to personalise your character, or download new levels and more advanced AI players for the offline singleplayer mode. To widen the potential audience, PC gamers will be able to compete against PS2 owners, and there will be both English language and Japanese versions. It's a simple idea, but as the likes of chess and backgammon are still the online experiences of choice for the masses, Capcom would seem to be barking up the correct multiplayer money tree.

Prescreen Alphas

This month's announcements and updates...

Sphinx

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: THQ
Developer: Eurocom





Sphinx is a platformer with a lot of very good ideas (such as an immortal mummy who can set himself alight, or electrify himself to solve puzzles). The challenge is to bring them together

Ghost Hunter

Format: Playstation2
Publisher: SCEE
Developer: In-house (Studio Cambridge)





Although **Edge** was disappointed by *Primal*, Studio Cambridge's next outing looks much more promising, and retains the developer's customary Gothic aesthetic and outlook

Billy Hatcher and the Giant Egg

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sonic Team





Yuji Naka's latest platformer is apparently in kiddie-friendly pursuit of the *Jak and Daxter* audience, and looks like a cross between *Yoshi's Island* and *Sonic*'s Chao gardens

Ka 2: Let's go to Hawaii

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: SCEI
Developer: Zoom





The sequel to the world's only mosquito sim again has you tormenting the Yamada family, this time during their Hawaiian holiday. Bigger areas and new gameplay aspects are promised

Kya: Dark Lineage

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Atari
Developer: Eden Studios





An action adventure promising featuring 34 quests and side missions as well as a central character who must increase her mystical powers. More on this once we're back from E3

LotR, The Return of the King

Format: PS2, Xbox, GC, PC
Publisher: EA
Developer: In-house (Redwood Shores Studio)





Return to Middle Earth and this time bring a friend – *Return of the King* features a multiplayer co-op mode as well as "multiple gameplay paths". Clarification should follow in **E**125

Mario Kart GC

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house





Multiplayer mayhem is assured: up to eight players can participate via the GameCube broadband adapter, but will it return to the gloriously precise handling of the 16bit original?

Thief III

Format: PC, Xbox
Publisher: Eidos
Developer: Ion Storm





Edge played an (already impressive) early Xbox version at last year's E3 but wasn't allowed to tell you about it. Expect the developer to be significantly more open at this year's LA event





Carve

Arguably, Wave Race 64 has still to be bettered for its undulating pleasures. Edge took a trip to north west London to discover if Carve can set a new benchmark and provide yet another reason to sign up to Xbox Live

Carve is nearly complete and it still hasn't got a publisher. It's the thing plaguing **Edge**'s mind as it enters Argonaut's studios in sunny Middlesex. Knowing how good the game is doesn't count for much. These are turbulent times and there are only a few UK developers with the clout and conviction to produce a game off its own bat.

"Funding the game ourselves gave us the opportunity to make the game that we want," says producer **Caspar Field**. "It was actually a low risk proposition." Initially an undisclosed publisher came to the company with the idea for a jetski game, but later pulled out. And there are other doubts. As you are reading this, the same question is probably buzzing around your head. Why make yet another jetski game when there are titles such as *Wave Race: Blue Storm* and *Splashdown* already on the market?

For Field there's only been one jetski game of note, more recent examples have simply not impressed. "*Wave Race 64* was a great Nintendo game. Personally speaking, it was the reason I bought my N64. Of course it's influenced us, just as great games always have and will. But this is seven years on and *Carve* offers advances in so many areas: the waves, team AI and trick systems – never mind the online mode – are fantastic additions to the genre. We're pushing things forwards – for us, that's the point. Anything less would be a waste of time."

Obvious questions out of the way, it's time to focus on *Carve*'s abundant qualities. Most conspicuous, and fundamental, are the handling and wave technologies which were the team's priorities. Argonaut wanted to make sure the game felt "just right." The detail extends to the physics of the jetski wakes, which becomes a essential part of the gameplay. After arduous research in places as exotic as Iceland, the Grand Canyon and Northampton, the *Carve* team discovered that racers use their wakes for strategical advantage over opponents.

"You have to stay out of the wakes of other craft, rather than using them to slipstream as in car racing," explains Field. "This is because jetski impellors pump a lot of air into the water as they move through it, which essentially makes the water behind

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **TBC**
Developer: **Argonaut Games**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **TBC**





As in all jetski games you'll have to weave between buoys, but miss more than four and you're disqualified. A clever reticule keeps you informed of the next marker, though this can be switched off. Of course, it's entirely possible to miss out some buoys on purpose to get ahead







Argonaut wanted to get away from the 'racing on jelly' feel of recent jetski games. The water surface itself consists of four bump maps that are realtime blended together to create random frequencies able to distort reflections. In short, riding the waves feels and looks impressive





the jetski less 'grippy' for anyone following. So, in *Carve*, when the AI riders try and 'block' the player, they do it by trying to leave their wakes in your way – ride too close behind them and you lose speed. It's a really unique playing dynamic."

"Wave Race 64 was a great Nintendo game, but this is seven years on and we're pushing things forwards – for us, that's the point. Anything less would be a waste of time"

Unquestionably the waves and wakes in *Carve* feel believably 'wibbly-wobbly'. Argonaut may have a number of techy soundbites to explain how the water physics work in principle, but that phrase seems to encapsulate the game's feel perfectly. The designers can adjust the wave for velocity, frequency and amplitude. Take a race around the canals of Amsterdam and you'll find the water far more stable, giving you more opportunity to perform tricks and stunts. Head out to Thailand, however, and the waves ripple across your screen at alarming heights. Inevitably this massively impacts on the cut and thrust of your jetski manoeuvring.

In terms of structure you won't find anything too radical. In the singleplayer game, tournaments are entered and points distributed *Mario Kart*-style. Tournaments take place in European, American, Arctic and Pacific locales. But what is more unusual is that your races are accompanied by a team-mate. Each duo adopts a different race style. One team is known for its tricks, another for aggression, one is defensive and another will take shortcuts at any opportunity. A team-mate may even "do a Ferrari and give up their position if it will benefit the player's tournament points," adds Field.

Adding to *Carve*'s haptic pleasures is an easy-to-learn, difficult-to-master trick system. Cleverly, performing tricks (anything from headstands to air somersaults) gives your rider a ten-second speed boost. Learning to trick at the most appropriate time is crucial for race success in the later stages. It's also possible to combine tricks to take

your boost meter to maximum and give you a mega rush. Each character also has four signature moves to unlock, any of which can trigger the mega rush if timed perfectly.

How such features balance out in the final game has yet to be seen, but already the trick system adds a great deal of fun to the online experience. Getting ahead isn't just about finding the perfect racing line, it's about showboating for advantage. Xbox Live will support eightplayer races, taking place in all the locations currently available in the singleplayer game.

The team is still fine tuning, but it's also likely that mini-tournaments will also be hosted. For ease of use it's up there with *MotoGP* and like Climax's title you'll need to become very adept to attain the highest online ranking.

Carve already has more to offer than *Wave Race: Blue Storm* and for Xbox owners it's yet another reason to get connected. Argonaut says the game is generating a lot of interest from publishers and on current form it should certainly be able to forge its own identity in the crowded racing game market.





Master *Carve*'s tournament ladder and you will unlock many extras. Modelled on *GoldenEye*'s cheats you'll be able to do many novel activities including racing in firstperson perspective





Half-Life 2

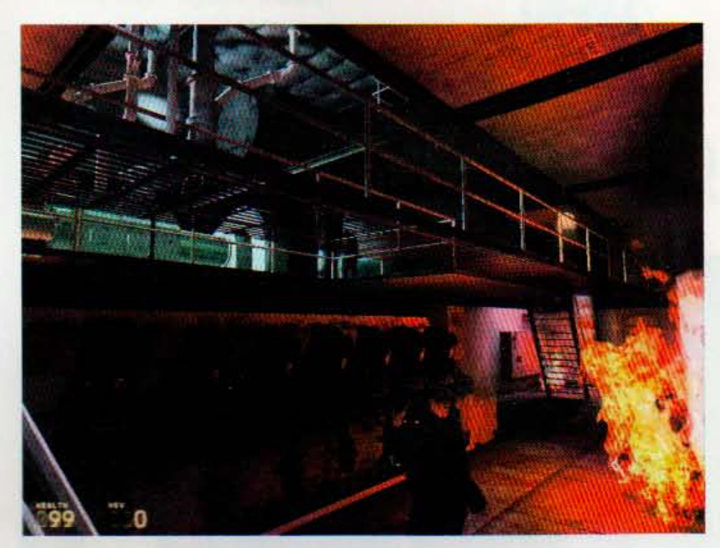
Life-like characters with genre-leading AI and lip-syncing you can lip-read. Double your Half-Life expectancy as Valve turns up the steam on the biggest sequel ever. Edge's faith in videogaming has been violently restored…

It arrives on September 30, which, at the time of writing, is a little over four months away – barely enough time for the major videogame retailers to set up their pre-recorded "Pre-order now!" phone messages, or for magazines to hype the game beyond any hope of it living up to expectations.

Actually, its arrival probably won't be news to you, anymore: again at the time of writing, the Internet is sweating with speculation. It begins with **Edge**, and last month's next month page. What else could a crowbar mean? The question catches fire on the fansites; then the covers of European magazines leak out. But they're fakes, surely, or maybe they're not, because a friend of a friend swears he heard from someone that it *is* in production, and has been for some time. And then the grainy screenshots leak out – on the same day Nintendo publishes the first shots of *Mario Kart GC*, unfortunately for Nintendo – and everything explodes.

Half-Life 2 is coming. It is coming soon, so soon, on September 30. At least according to **Gabe Newell**, Valve's founder and managing director. "We decided we'd do the whole 'when it's done' stuff first," he says, claiming that the game has been in development since *Half-Life*'s release, some five years ago. **Edge** is used to its cover games' release dates shifting like mirages – see *Galleon*, *The Getaway* and *Republic* for three infamous examples – but Newell is set on this. The end of September. On your marks. Get set. Hype.

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **TBC**
Developer: **Valve**
Origin: **US**
Release: **September 30**



The physical properties of *Half-Life 2*'s world are utterly convincing – everything behaves, sounds and 'feels' as you'd expect. Naturally, expect the final thing to be mod-maker friendly

In fact, Newell's claim that the game's been in development since 1998 is slightly misleading. Prior to September 2002 Valve was working on an engine described as "proof of concept." The concept proven – and the Source toolkit built, a kit which will ship with the game and that Newell claims is much more robust for mod-making – the team moved on to the game, all the tools in place to build something worthy of the '2'. Because that's all it is: *Half-Life 2*. No riders, no subtitles, no franchise-building colons. The '2' should be enough to let 7m-plus owners of the original know that it's time to reacquaint themselves with a man called Gordon Freeman.

True story. Around the time *Half-Life*'s ill-fated Dreamcast port was nearing completion Vivendi's staff once walked into the **Edge** office bearing preview code and wearing a t-shirt that read, "Who is Gordan Freeman?" Given the fervent fanbase of the game, what price a simple spelling mistake on official *Half-Life* merchandise on eBay? Probably

significantly less than **Edge**'s gold-code copy of the DC version, but no matter: few videogame players need to be told Who Gordon Freeman is, making him the most famous firstperson character in videogame history. Unsurprisingly, he's back.

The story picks up where the last left off. Comprised of 12 chapters (and approximately 36 hours of playtime, making it longer than the original), *Half-Life 2* sees Freeman swapping his position as Innocent Scientist In A World Gone Mad for a role at the side of the G-Man, the pale besuited fellow who popped up throughout *Half-Life* and offered Freeman a job at the end.

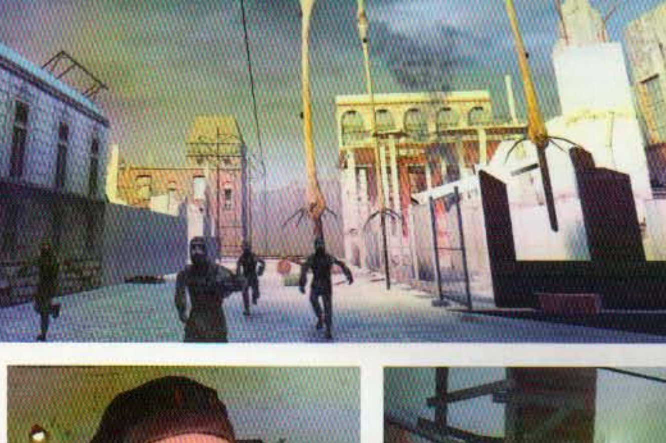
Freeman's not alone, though. He's joined by Alyx Vance, daughter of a scientist from the Black Mesa research facility, and together they've found themselves trapped in City 17, an eastern European municipality invaded by aliens. That's where things start. Valve isn't saying any more; this is a story-led experience, albeit one that will be defined by its moments.

When you're playing *Half Life*, you're playing the moments. You're waiting for the gangway to collapse, or the lift cable to snap. You're waiting for the alien that's 100 times your size to appear from beneath you and start tap-tap-tapping on the metal walkway nearby. That set-pieces will play a huge part in the sequel is obvious, but Valve's hope is that they're going to be much more organic.



The AI is remarkable with your opponents able to navigate all types of ter assess level of threat and search their environment if they're looking for y

"As ever, God is in the details: watch the muscles move beneath the clothing, watch the perfect lip-syncing, watch the light reflect off the characters' corneas"



"Many times in *Half-Life*, it was fairly obvious that you were witnessing a 'scripted sequence,'" says **Mark Laidlaw**, the man behind the *Half-Life* story. "A good example of this is the falling elevator sequence at the beginning of the game, which happens the same way every time. We have used our tried-and-true devices as springboards for jumping into new kinds of scripting, where the borderlines between 'scripted' and 'unscripted' aren't so obvious."

Combat evolved, then? Perhaps. *Half-Life*'s most important step forward appears to be the introduction of real-world physics into the environment. Every object in the game has its own weight and mass, and Freeman will be able to manipulate the majority of things he sees in whatever way the player sees fit.

In one demonstration, **Edge** witnesses Valve's senior software development engineer **Jay Stelly** outwitting a constantly firing auto-turret. A metal grate, picked up from the floor nearby, provides protection for Freeman as he inches closer to the turret, then becomes a projectile itself, flung at the gun. The grate is heavy enough to knock the turret over; it continues firing, but now the bullets are harmlessly ricocheting off the floor.

It's a mini set-piece, slightly set up but played to the player's rhythm, defined by their wit. There are countless more. Shoot a gas canister's pressure valve and it spins out of control, potentially dangerous, potentially helpful. See something wooden, and you can set it alight, or break it into a thousand pieces with some ballistic artistry. Drop a wrench into whirring machinery and the whirring machinery will not be whirring for much longer.

The physics engine within Source is derived from Havok, which opens



The facial animation and detail of the main characters is phenomenal and the result of the developer's substantial research into the elements that constitute human expression. The work has paid off: *Half-Life 2*'s protagonists possess an undeniable emotive quality, which when combined with advanced lip-syncing and skeletal animation techniques render them the most convincing, most impressively life-like characters Edge has witnessed in a game. Screenshots can't begin to do them justice



Rather than opt for a licensed engine this time, Valve has built its own proprietary version. The ragdoll physics employed for the characters is just one superlative aspect of the game



up a wealth of possibilities for object interaction – particularly when you consider that at some point in the game, Freeman receives an energy-beam weapon that lets him move huge objects...

The real physics extends as far as the characters, all of whom have extensive virtual musculature and utilise true inverse kinetics. It's not hard to see the difference between the models on display here and those from the original *Half-Life*, but it's seeing them in action that really shows off the difference. As ever, God is in the details: watch the muscles move beneath the clothing, watch the perfect lip-syncing, watch the light reflect off the characters' corneas. Nor is this just peripheral detail; if Vance focuses on an object in the room, there's a fair chance it's important.

It could just be a Head Crab, of course. Those will return, along with the Xen aliens, but there'll be significant newcomers too. Valve introduces **Edge** to two of them. Ant lions are pug-faced insects that run in packs, and use scent to distinguish and track down their enemies. When Freeman's scientist pals manage to produce a 'friend scent' for him to wear, the ant lions become a useful ally. It's not the first time *Half-Life*'s AI opponents have used senses other than sight – most will recall the lethal tentacles in the first game, which could only be avoided if Freeman was quiet enough.

The other enemy on show is the Strider. A 50-foot, three-legged creature reminiscent of the towering stalkers from 'War of the Worlds', the Strider is jaw-dropping. It totters through City 17 and walkways in its path crumble. When it finds an obstacle it can't destroy, a sturdier bridge halfway up its body, it kneels down and goes beneath it. The AI here is apparently smarter than ever, not bad when you consider the scripting in the game's prequel is still considered by many to be unparalled on the PC. "One of the best things about our AI is that it understands context," says Stelly. "NPCs use information about the world and the story to help choose behavior."

And that can help Freeman out, too. "In *Half-Life*, Barney always ran





Before and after – what four and a half years can mean for technology. Characters from the original *Half-Life* and their impressive representation in the sequel. The quality of the voice acting matches the that of the game's other superior aspects

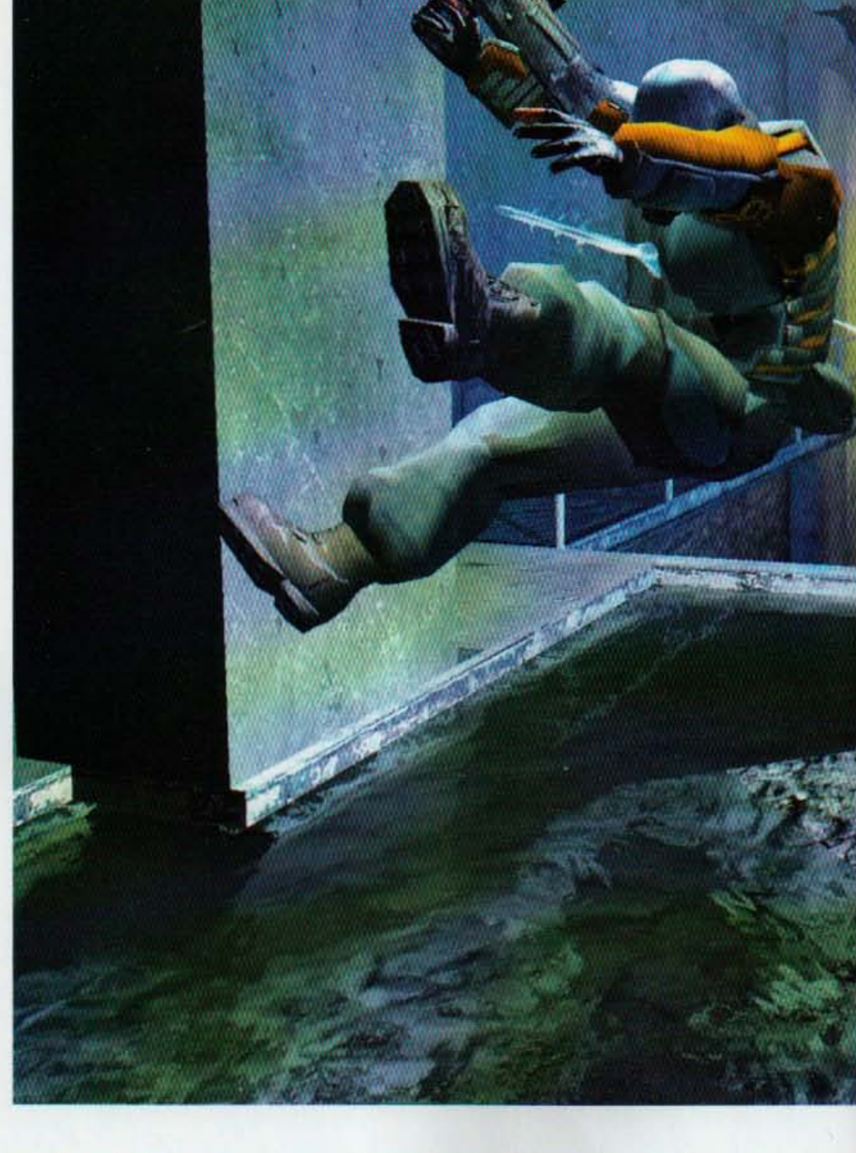


Development heaven

Half-Life alone was impressive enough to warrant the phenomenal sales figures, a significant number of the 7.5m copies of the PC version were bought because the game offered such potential for community-driven expansion. The Source toolkit is even more user-friendly, offering things like intuitive texturing to speed up the level-design process. Each level in *Half-Life 2* begins as an "orange map" – a prototype of the final map so named because of its orange-hued, untextured architecture. Levels can be extensively tested in 'orange' mode by designers, before handing them over to artists for texturing.

Somewhat like physical substances themselves, material textures in the Source engine are tagged to automatically replicate the aural and physical properties of the object it represents (including lighting effects and collision detection). Slap a metallic texture on a door, for example, and bullets will ricochet and ping against its surface, creating minute pockmarks; a brick texture will make a very different sound, with much more pronounced bullet holes. Illustrating this, the team demonstrated how a metal barrel scraping against a tile wall will spark and kick up dust, generating an irritatingly realistic screeching sound. Changing the material properties of either the barrel or the wall changes their interaction – an effect accomplished merely by assigning a new texture.





into a fight with guns blazing," compares Stelly. "In *Half-Life 2*, he behaves very differently."

Barney, the podgy put-upon security guard at the Black Mesa complex in the original game, built up something of a cult following, culminating in his own spin-off game, the (entertaining, but brief) *Blue Shift*. His return here reaffirms one of *Half-Life*'s greatest traits: emotion. "Characters that were throwaways for us when we started working on *Half-Life* turned into this thing that people really responded to," says Laidlaw. "We constantly heard stories about people taking Barney into a turret by accident and feeling horrible when he was killed. We just realised we had this great way of getting emotion out of a gamer."

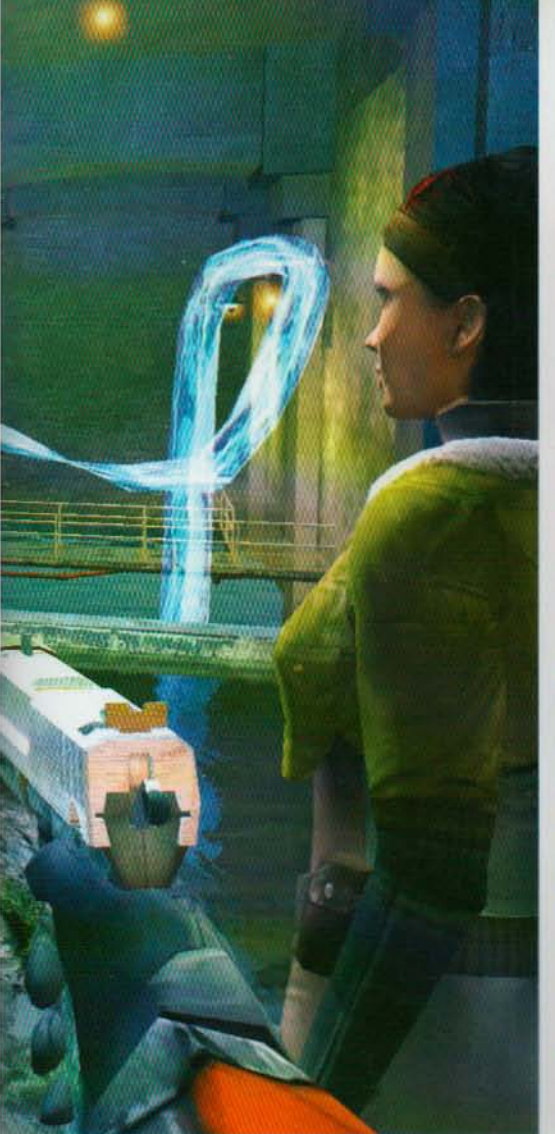
The game's no aesthetic slouch, either, but those who don't lie at the cutting edge of PC gaming technology shouldn't suffer. While *Half-Life 2* will take advantage of 3Ghz PCs equipped with the latest graphics cards and DirectX9, Valve claims it's also possible to play it on a mid-range PC running an old TNT card and DirectX6. The key here is maximising its potential userbase – not that Newell seems particularly worried about that. "We knew, given the strength of our fanbase, that we would be successful with *Half-Life 2*. So we said, 'Let's take everything we can and see how far we can push it with the next generation of technology, gameplay, and character design.'"

With 5,000 polygons per character model, diffused and specular bump mapping similar to that in *Doom III*, and a powerful particle and lighting system that allows realtime luminescence and mirroring effects, it's fair to say Valve's pushing it quite far. But again, many of the features have been included to a specific end, in this case the demand in *Half-Life 2* for large outdoor scenes. The terrain system uses the bump





For the sequel, Valve has increased the number of outdoor locations significantly and you won't find yourself on an alien world this time – all of the action stays firmly on Earth. It's what the fans wanted









mapping capabilities to make flat ground surfaces appear uneven, or to refract and distort objects underwater. "It lets you make organic spaces as complicated as you want them to be," says Newell, "without costing any rendering time."

And that allows designers to concentrate less on the limitations of the engine – something that frustrated the team during *Half-Life*'s creation – and more on creating compelling, terrifying set-pieces. In the final demonstration of the day, Freeman finds himself in a suspiciously quiet corridor. There is something in the shadows, and then it is out of the shadows and almost upon the player, who balks and flees to the nearest room, the metal door slamming and locking behind them. There is a brief silence, then the door starts rattling in its frame as the creature tries to get through. It can't. Another pause.

Then with a crash, splintering glass and warping metal and skipping heartbeats, a fist smashes through the small window at the top of the door. It withdraws, and an eye on a stalk snakes through, scanning around the room. It sees Freeman, stops, and stares. As soon as it has retracted, back through the window and to its host, the door comes under renewed attack. And then it falls, and the creature is there, and you're in a dead end, and then…

Then it's up to you. There will be hundreds of moments like this throughout *Half-Life 2*, and dozens of way each can be resolved. There will be millions of players, each with a story to tell – stories about how *they* dealt which *that* piece of thrilling circumstance craftily carved by Valve's designers.

And, if all goes to plan, that's where the sequel will excel, because the set-pieces won't be spectacular isolated performances, but part of something greater, something emergent. Something that's scheduled to appear on monitors globally on September 30. Four months and counting, then.

"We knew Half-Life 2 would be a success . So we said, 'Let's see how far we can push it with the next generation of technology, gameplay, and character design.'"

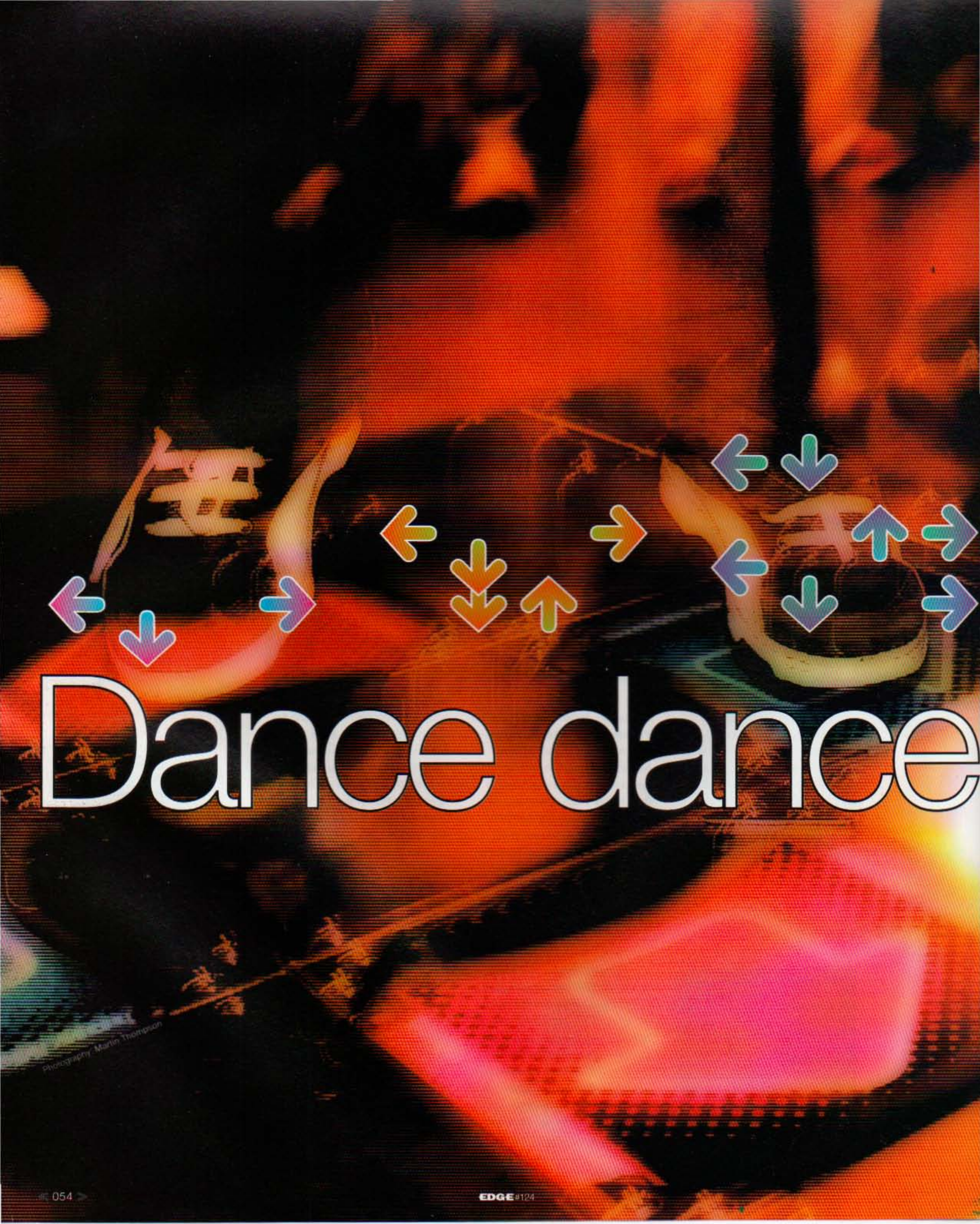


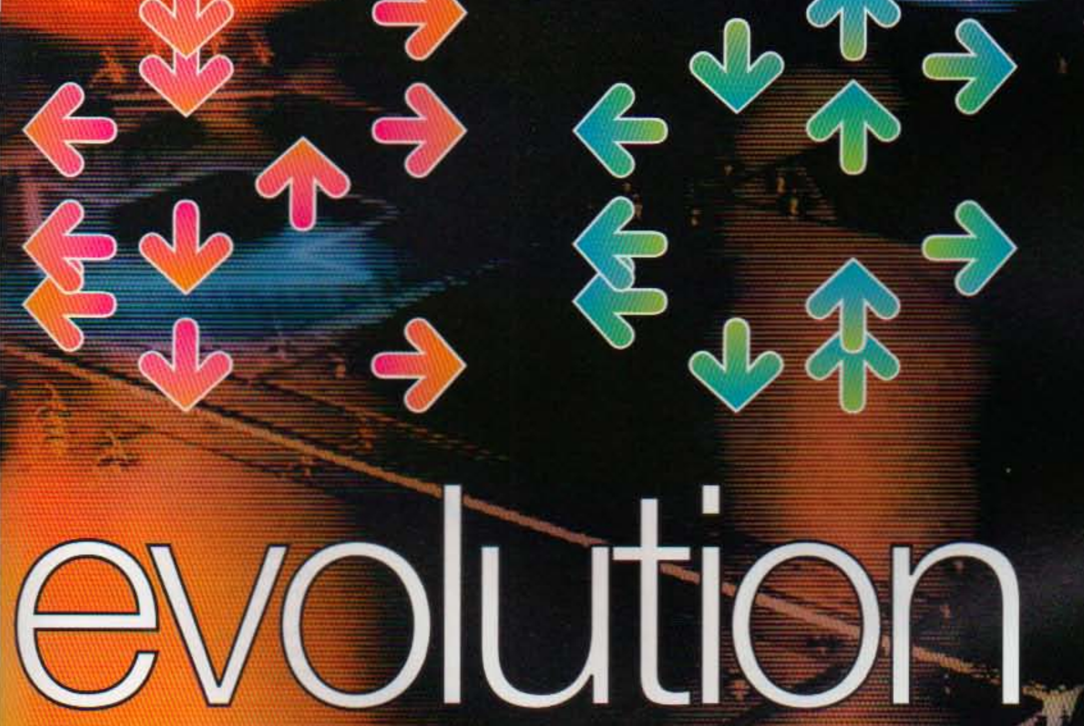
Valve claims to have invested most of the money made from the hugely successful prequel into *Half-Life 2*'s development

Soft images

SoftimageIXSI is Valve's "prop and character tool of choice" for *Half-Life 2*. **Edge** spoke to the company.

"Valve is building a product that revolutionises the visual and experiential sophistication of in-game characters, and it needs a 3D art tool that will provide an equivalent level of sophistication at content creation time. With XSI, with the invention and introduction of tools such as the Animation Mixer, and the whole paradigm of character-level manipulation, we're still innovating and helping to take the industry into new territory (tools like advanced spine structures and specialised rigging systems for limbs). We focus our research investment on the needs of 3D artists – our goal is to deliver intuitive, creative art tools that anticipate emerging production needs, and let artists explore their talent productively."


Dance dance
Photography: Martin Thompson



evolution

Some claim it was the last great, undiscovered videogaming genre. Others bemoan its simplicity. Others still, its complexity. Few argue it helped kick-start, perhaps for the last time, an arcade industry entering its twilight years. Edge takes a look at the short yet bright history, and uncertain future, of rhythm action...

Arcade games are about showing off. Once upon a time it used to be *Dragon's Lair* that generated crowds and inspired gasps from teenagers. But bizarrely it's a fad from the '80s that is keeping the arcade industry alive. No, not LaserDisc, but breakdancing. Or at least its digitally inspired equivalent.

And if there's one name that rules supreme in the rhythm action arena, it's Konami. The company's rhythm action family tree has blossomed with a speed and voracity usually reserved for videogame football franchises. The first rhythm action title in Japanese arcades was not *Dance Dance Revolution*, as the casual onlooker might presume, but rather *Beatmania*. It's from this DJ-based simulator that Konami coined and copyrighted the description 'bemani' in an attempt to exert complete ownership over the genre (see Having your cake and eating it).

The premise of *Beatmania* is simple and will be familiar to anyone who has ever rapped, danced, samba'd, taiko drummed or conducted with a videogame avatar. Gameplay is derived from what most regard as the first Japanese rhythm action videogame, *PaRappa the Rapper*. In almost all rhythm action titles music plays, establishing a rhythm, while the player follows onscreen indicators to hit various buttons (or break infrared beams) in time with the pulse. The game monitors the player's accuracy of timing and will score each hit accordingly. Bump up the difficulty and the frequency of hits the player must achieve increases proportionally. It's the simplicity of rules that attracts the novice and the universal nature of the gameplay has helped establish the genre across the world.

However, the future for rhythm action in Japan (at least in the arcades) is far from assured as incredulous operators have watched its homeland popularity in the last 18 months fast dwindling. Tales of over-enthusiastic arcade-goers facing financial ruin from *DDR* are a thing of the past. Konami, despite seeing a 260 per cent increase in net income at the end of the fiscal year in 1999 (directly attributed by the company to rhythm action) is quickly but quietly putting each of its golden child bemani franchises to sleep, something no one would have predicted three years ago.



Perhaps the last innovation from the company comes in the form of *Aerobics Revolution* released on PS2 in March. Expensive new cabinets (often costing twice as much as a standard upright) combined with a newly out-of-fashion arcade experience could be a costly mistake Konami is not prepared to make, so machines are, to date, largely being sidelined in Japan. Experts suggest that the market has been saturated, and with over 40 versions of *Beatmania* on home and arcade formats in Japan it's hard to disagree.

In the US the genre has never taken off and the PAL territories have seen many titles (mainly from Konami) that were deemed unsuitable for the US niche. However, if bemani has become stale in Japan, the opposite is true in the UK with *Dance Dance Revolution* games and clones now filling our western shopping centres. Whether such popularity in the mainstream UK will be sustained is highly unlikely, as market trends will undoubtedly follow the Japanese. We could be seeing videogaming's first high-profile global fad. Although at first glance it seems unheard of that a new and exciting genre should go out of fashion in the world of games so quickly, looking at the roots of the genre in Japan, it should not be so surprising.

The empty orchestra

It's arguable that rhythm action could never have been invented in its current form outside of Japan. Unlike genres such as the RPG, which have their roots both in the east and west, rhythm action is an arcade phenomenon born from decades of Japanese cultural inclusiveness. **Edge** doesn't need to tell you that the Japanese are generally shy people ruled by the kinds of strict societal codes the British usually associate with royal ceremony. Exuberance and extrovert behaviour have for centuries been permissible only when housed by a set social framework that members of the group are aware of. Group value is of the highest importance in Japanese culture. The recognition of individual identity is achieved through establishing relationships with others and then maintaining and reinforcing those relationships; a standard oriental social ideology shaped primarily by Confucianism and Taoism. It's this paradigm that shapes the way Japanese culture approaches entertainment.

The key objective of entertainment, unlike for the westerner, is not primarily for entertaining oneself but rather a way to indulge oneself in



Home versions of Konami's bemani titles often received add-on disks: these cheaper updates required the full games to be booted first and then unlocked new songs

> Peripheral vision

Edge takes a look at some of the instruments that have found their way out of the plastic moulds and into the homes of the rhythm nation...



1. Guitar

The first guitar-based, rhythm action controller came in the form of Konami's own *Guitar Freaks*. *Guitar Freaks* and *Drummania* are separate arcade games, but share the same soundtrack and are able to be networked together so that one player can play the guitar portion of a song and another player can play the drum portion to make the experience more like being in a band. *GitaDora* was a 2001 release for PS2 combining *Guitar Freaks 4th Mix* and *Drummania 3rd Mix*.



2. Dance mat

The most famous rhythm action peripheral, at least in the west, is undoubtedly the dance mat. Konami did not limit the usage of the peripheral to *DDR* games including compatibility in a huge swathe of Japanese titles such as *The Kiss Destination* and *Goo Goo Soundy*. Logic 3 is soon to release a hard mat version of its best-selling, thirdparty, plastic peripheral which will retail at £125. The UK's own dance peripheral is an intriguing addition to the catalogue and rare to boot.



3. Keyboard

Konami's *Keyboardmania* peripheral for the home is disliked by all but the most dedicated rhythm action fan. Without intimate knowledge of the keyboard it is extremely hard to line up which key one is supposed to be hitting at which point. The poor graphics and interface further spoil what is widely regarded as Konami's weakest bemani offering. The meagre number of sequels in comparison to other franchises tells all.

4. Turntable

Beatmania is the oldest bemani game. There are four major versions of the *Beatmania* series and over 40 titles available for the home market from PSone to WonderSwan. *Beatmania* is played on a box with five to seven buttons and a tiny turntable on the side. At the basic level the player must follow the notes on the screen to hit the buttons and spin the turntable in the correct order and in the proper rhythm to create beats and advance to the next level and song.




5. Taiko drum

Namco's *Taiko No Tatsujin* first appeared in the arcade in 2000. Based on the art of modern taiko drumming the game splits the peripheral into two halves and requires the player to perform a series of drum rolls and rim shots in time with various anime and classic themes. The full title of the PS2 conversion released in 2002 is *Taiko No Tatsujin: Tatakon De Dodon Ga Don*. A more onomatopoeic title you will not find.

6. Maraca
The first non-Konami title to really get PAL gamers excited was released for Dreamcast with a production number of 50,000 sets brought into Europe (one sea shipment container full). Only six units were held back for the customer service department in case of any breakages. Just as thrilling as in the arcade, the peripheral was of a high quality and felt just right. Yuji Naka managed to marry complicated sensor technology with groundbreaking gameplay in the home and the result is stunning. One of the few peripherals that actually works when the game is switched off.

7. Tambourine
Sega's 'other' rhythm action game, *Samba*'s pseudo sequel, *Shakka To Tambourine* saw the player mastering the intricacies of shakes and brushes. The home conversion came not to Dreamcast, as many would have hoped, but to PSone complete with Mini Moni J-pop tie-in. Despite being aimed at the younger player and being inferior to *Samba* in almost every way the tambourine title can still shake up a storm at the right party.

8. Baton
While *Mad Maestro* will be familiar to UK players, Global A's *The Maestro Music* probably won't be. Complete with baton peripheral the player takes on the role of orchestral conductor and must direct the orchestra through various famous classic pieces. The faster the baton is waved the faster the orchestra play and the more forceful the players movements the louder the volume. Player's are marked on their performance. Quirky Japanese rhythm action at its best.

9. Microphone
More than one developer has tried its hand at karaoke. JVC's *Wondermega* had a karaoke option while Sega's *Sonic Karaoke* add-on for Dreamcast allowed users to download songs from the D-Direct Website. Jaleco's *Dream Audition* (a port of a very hard to find arcade game) took things to the next level and made a game out of the concept in 2000. It was so successful on PS2 that there are now five iterations in the series but at ¥10,500 (£56) the original is not cheap.

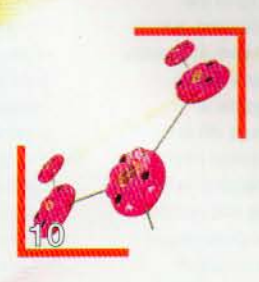
10. Para para
The genre went full circle in March 2001 when Konami's *Para Para Paradise* was released in Japan for PS2. A radial set of sensors located in front of the dancer register arm and hand gestures. Watching the arrows onscreen the player must motion towards the corresponding sensor as each cue is up. As one of the most advanced peripherals one can buy for the home market, importers tend to charge prices to match. Nevertheless if you want to explore the roots of the genre, this is the place to come.











the group and interact with others. As such the entertainment forms that provide the most pleasure to the Japanese are those that perform functions of personal enjoyment married with corporate edification within a social group. The primary example of this ideology's marriage with music came in the late-'70s on the west coast of Japan. Legend has it that at a snack bar in Kobe the scheduled entertainer failed to show up one night. Not wanting to disappoint his customers, the entrepreneurial owner decided to play instrumental tapes of popular songs and give people the opportunity to sing along on the microphone. It was a huge success, and the worldwide entertainment phenomenon karaoke was born.

In actuality the digital form of prompting whereby a dot signals which word to sing along with is more likely to have originated in 1950s US children's cartoons but, as per usual, it was the Japanese who took the format and made it uniquely their own. Karaoke provided one of the few opportunities for an individual to show himself or herself in front of others with his or her own voice, without being branded arrogant or self-centred. It fulfils the human desire to gain credit as an individual without jeopardising the Japanese need to be accepted by the group. Something that Konami's bemani machines would capitalise on two decades later.

The next step came in the early-'80s. Japanese home building practice means walls are often wooden, making singing at home in the evening a disturbing affair for unsuspecting neighbours. It was only a matter of time before karaoke boxes were born. Taking the form of an acoustically isolated booth, karaoke boxes were placed on roadsides and in shopping centres where people could sing their hearts out with their friends without fear of causing annoyance. The first box was placed in a rice camp of Prefectura de Okayama, in the eastern zone of Kansai in 1984. There are now over 100,000 karaoke boxes in Japan. In recent times accompaniment has become increasingly popular in many bars (to encourage group interaction), and patrons are given percussion instruments such as maracas and tambourines.

Untamed paradise

The arrival of the disco scene to Japan in the 1970s brought its own set of social scruples. Besides the then strict rulings on permissible clothing for disco goers, there was the issue of how to express oneself in unfettered dancing. Devoid of an unwritten social rulebook for the disco environment the dance practice para para was born (allegedly in Harajuku) and, in part, provided the necessary framework for disco fever. Para para is a 'dance' style based on upper-body movement (mainly arms) and each song has a fixed set of moves the dancer needs to follow, as in the song 'Macarena'.

"Para para is a 'dance' style with a fixed set of moves to follow. It obeyed all the societal rules and pandered to the Japanese love for routine yet clothed it in a new way for the upcoming generation"

During the early-'80s one person standing at the front of the disco facing the crowd would dance a routine for a particular song, which the crowd would then learn and follow. Japanese record companies soon saw the financial benefits of giving people para para routines to go with their hits and had their artists, such as Namie Amuro, MAX and Takuya Kimura, devise their own routines for their videos.

There are films from the early-'80s of Japanese dancehalls full of young people all performing the exact same routine in time with one another in relative silence. Para para obeyed all the societal rules and pandered to the Japanese love for routine yet clothed it in a



In *Tam Tam Paradise* you play a cherub in training, doing good deeds by way of slapping percussion in time to a stream of descending angel wings





> Lord of the dance

Edge let one of the world's *Pump It Up* champions, an Englishman who became so good at the game that Andamiro (and later Konami) employed him to promote their titles around the world, tell the story of his rhythmic affair. He has asked that his identity be kept a secret.

"The first rhythm game I played was *Bust-A-Move* on import PSone. I wasn't into dance then but soon after playing it I remember thinking that the game would work beautifully with maybe arm sensors and floor panels. *Beatmania* came next which I fell in love with. The way the series' difficulty progressed to keep up with the players showed real intelligence on Konami's part. Then *Dance Dance Revolution* arrived and despite the fact I got heavily into the sequels, the UK versions were always very poor.

"By this stage I was attending dance classes, and I was obsessed with street dance styles. I quickly outgrew *DDR* because the game is *Beatmania* with your feet – it's all about following steps and keeping a rhythm and allows no freedom, even in Normal mode, to dance properly. *Para Para*, and *EZ2 Dancer* came to the UK around the same time as *Pump It Up*. *EZ2* plays similar to *DDR* but the downside is that you can't perform to the crowd, as the position of the sensors requires you to face the screen.

"*Pump It Up* was different though: the choice of music is far better than Konami's staple sounds which only appeal to the [people] at Konami Europe. *Pump It Up* is hip-hop based and is geared purely towards giving the player the freedom to create their own routines. The steps make sense for choreography as they follow repeating patterns for each section of the song. They miss out certain steps and leave sections blank, as they know what players are capable of when given the opportunity. The Crazy mode is significantly harder than *DDR*'s SSR mode with sections where you have to hit three, four and even five arrows at once. The Nonstop Remix mode (unlike *DDR*) is a nonstop remix rather than just three random songs tagged onto each other although this mode as yet is only in the Korean version."













Handheld beatmania has been big business in Japan with a huge plethora of Game & Watch-style titles as well as Game Boy, WonderSwan Color and even NGPC tie-ins

new way for the upcoming generation. But para para (and to a lesser extent karaoke) was to fall foul of another more modern Japanese trait: the love of the fad. While in the UK we have seen one major resurgence and subsequent decline of '70s culture, one analyst estimates that para para has been in and out of fashion with young Japanese people no less than four times in the last two decades.

Para para and karaoke are undoubtedly the parents from which the whole rhythm action genre has originated and it was only a matter of time before the concept was married with videogame technology.

Origin of a species

While *PaRappa* is considered to be the Japanese originator of rhythm action, a very basic version of the game was being used in western toys prior to 1996. Eighteen years earlier Milton Bradley, pre-Vectrex, released its toy Simon. This musical version of Simon Says caught the public's imagination and went on to become a best-selling, must-have toy. The idea was simple: the computer plays a tune that the player then has to relay using the four brightly coloured pads. Get it wrong and Simon blows a computerised raspberry at you.

The same idea surfaced in a C64 game six years later in 1984. *Breakdance* saw the player enjoying one of four games in which he attempted to copy opponent's breakdance moves before the clock ran out. At the time reviewer **Gary Penn** summed it up thus, "On the whole, *Breakdance* is boring. Three of the four games are essentially variations of the Simon Says theme, and all of them are rather dull."





The C64's *Breakdance* is just one western example of an early dance-based Simon Says title. **Edge** could say that some of these games inspired Konami in recent years but we would probably be lying

While rhythmic games had been seen in the vein of Konami's *Track and Field*, we were yet to see a music-centred game that tested rhythmic accuracy. Rhythm action was to open up new avenues for both home-orientated gameplay and the arcade scene. In 1996 Sony took a brave artistic chance and the revolution started.

The first rhythm-based scoring game was a design triumph for director **Masaya Matsuura** and lead artist Rodney Greenblat. Combining a

> "I wanted to make people enjoy music as their own experience. I believe that the live concert is one of the best ways to enjoy music and I yearned to virtualise its live expression for those who don't play"

Despite the fact the game had a freestyle mode this was a precursor to the genre only in part. In fact true predecessors to the Japanese rhythm action phenomenon outside of karaoke and para para are nearly impossible to find. There's the Colecovision's *Dance Fantasy* where the player programs a mannequin to perform sequences of badly animated dance routines and a host of other dim and distant games with 'dancing' in the title. But the key difference was that neither MB's Simon nor any of the computer-based variations took into account accuracy of rhythm. These were essentially Simon Says games with a tenuous musical tie-in.

leftfield storyline and a unique (and culturally inclusive) art style with revolutionary gameplay, *PaRappa the Rapper* is the game that started the disco ball rolling. **Edge** asked Matsuura-san where the original idea came from, "I originally composed all my music by computer. However, I always had serious thoughts as to how music, a medium traditionally just listened to, could be interacted with in videogame form. I wanted to make people enjoy music as their own experience, so I got the idea of producing a music game. I believe that the live concert is one of the best ways to enjoy music and I yearned to virtualise its ultimate live expression for those who do not play."

> Ten rhythm action games you've never played

Although the flood of rhythm action titles has slowed considerably, there are a number of titles that even the most dedicated importer will have missed. Here are ten of the best and most playable…




Paca Paca Passion Special
PSone
24/06/99
Produce

The third title in a standard rhythm action game series in the vein of *Pop'n Music*. Produce released its own special rhythm pad for this.




Rhythm n' Face
PSone
09/03/00
Asmik Ace Entertainment

A leftfield and interesting rhythm action game where the goal is to create a face on a grid within an allotted amount of time.





Kaikan Phrase
PSone
24/02/00
Enix

A game based on the popular Japanese anime following the fortunes of a rock group. It's also compatible with Produce's rhythm action controller.





Perfect Performer (The Yellow Monkey)
PSone
01/07/99
Funhouse

A poor *PaRappa* clone whereby you control one of four members of the band Yellow Monkey. The game plays differently depending on whether you play as the drummer, bassist, guitarist or singer.




Puyo Puyo Da
Dreamcast
16/12/99
Compile

Better known for deep puzzling, the *Puyo Puyo* series occasionally takes a diversion. This is Compile's rhythm action venture playing rather like Enix's *Bust-A-Move*.





Mini Moni Step-Up Pyon Pyon Pyon
PSone
12/12/02
Konami

Released a couple of months after the better known *Tambourine* game here the player joins J-pop group Mini Moni as a dancer. Uses Konami's *DDR* mats.





Tokimeki Memorial 2: Dancing Summer Vacation
PSone
28/09/00
Konami

Released at the height of bemani fever in Japan this is one of the many *Tokimeki* sidestory games. The subtitle alludes to the *DDR* section that lies within.





Dog of Bay
PlayStation2
14/12/00
Marvelous

This would be a standard *Bust-A-Move* clone were it not for the fact that the dancers all have canine heads.





Evangelion Typing E-Keikaku
PlayStation2
02/08/01
Artdink

This part rhythm action title is unique in that it utilises the USB keyboard for PS2. The onscreen persona dance in time with your precision typing.





Cool Cool Jam
Neo-Geo Pocket Color
10/08/00
SNK

Although this game tied in (and linked up) with the excellent *Cool Cool Toon* on DC it actually plays very differently. With 12 instruments you are required to hold the NGPC in different ways to play each variation.

> Future publishing

Edge asked a few industry insiders for their take on the future of the rhythm action genre...

"The problem for rhythm action in the UK arcades is that operators in the UK don't have a clue about how to make their centres appeal to today's gamer. Personally I don't believe any of Korea's or Japan's players (even the very best) are any better than the UK's best. We just don't have any decent places to play or any well-run tournaments to attend. Arcade operators have no idea how to create a place to complement people's home gaming. It's a tragedy that has both helped restrict the spread of rhythm action and is now slowly killing it."
***Pump It Up* world championships contender**

"I consider music as an important factor in any new game idea. Not as a mere BGM, but I think it can be a breakthrough for many games, which are not related with music. The rhythm action genre has already reached its peak and hit the ceiling here in Japan. Now, we must look into how music can be interactive in other game types or concentrate on developing different types of music to generate new gaming experiences. I think music games have the ability to tap into certain parts of the brain that other games can't. I would like to see the concept itself becoming newer and fresher rather than adding to what already constitutes the 'rhythm action' game. The challenge is making such games appeal to as many people as possible."
Hiroyuki Kotani

"Games based on music are not always naturally rhythm action. The point is that music is an art form without form: it cannot be represented as an object. Paintings and novels have similar nature but they are distinct from music in that they have to be fixated in order to communicate. Music's immaterial nature means it will always be a significant asset in any art expression through any media. I don't know if there is a game that fully explores the possibilities there yet."
Masaya Matsuura

"Lately, the genre hasn't been faring too well, but I think it's safe to say that music is not going anywhere, so I'm positive that another game will come along that is really great and innovative. I'd like there to be more of a difference in gameflow in terms of the player's ability. For example, if a player was doing very well, the song/game would become more difficult and as a result, be more impressive. And if a player was struggling, the game would play easier, but wouldn't sound as cool. There are all kinds of things. That being said, I guess I'll have to be the one to make it."
Yukio Shimomura

> Having your cake and eating it

Konami's desperation to keep a firm stranglehold on the rhythm action arcade game was evidenced in 2000 when it filed an "injunction against manufacturing and selling with respect to a right to design" against Andamiro before the Seoul District Court for its rival dance simulation game *Pump It Up*. The Seoul district court ruled in favour of Konami on June 8, 2000. However, the case, as a patent infringement case, went to the Korea Intellectual Property Office (KIPO), which consequently ruled in favour of Andamiro on March 8, 2001 issuing the official statement, "In a patent review case filed in KIPO concerning an infringement against Konami's patent right, the agency concluded that *Pump It Up* is not similar to the design of a *DDR* machine developed by Konami, therefore, there is no ground for Andamiro's violating Konami's patent right."

As KIPO and the district court made contradictory rulings, the case was taken to the patent office. Konami was clearly playing to make a point (possibly to Namco et al): Andamiro had already halted production of its *Pump It Up* meaning Konami would have no ground to claim compensations. One IP reporter at the time stated, "Given that the Japanese firm singled out an outdated model whose production already stopped, and filed an injunction in a court after losing the KIPO case, Japanese game makers seem to be poised to step up legal assaults against Korean counterparts which have made rapid growth, in a bid to keep them at bay." The patent court finally ruled that as a game, Andamiro's *Pump It Up* doesn't infringe a design patent right of *DDR* of Japanese Konami. The patent court gave a decision that a design of *Pump It Up* doesn't belong to the right scope of registered *DDR* design in an intermediate appeal instituted by Konami. Konami declined to comment. These developments paved the way for titles such as Comad's *Let's Dance* series: almost direct copies of *DDR*.





Console rhythm action games have been a breeding ground for innovators but game structure has remained fiercely traditional with the same basic level-by-level progression we have enjoyed for the last 20 years

PaRappa's unique kawai styling and accessible gameplay earned the game a legion of Japanese fans, cuddly toys and McDonald's endorsements. The importance of *PaRappa*'s stylistic accessibility cannot be underestimated as it ensured that the game was not too Japanese for cultural export and also helped introduce female gamers to a genre they might not have otherwise looked into. While there are many *PaRappa* clubs in Japan run by females, more important than the cult of the protagonist, the game demonstrated a core universal gameplay that was at once both enjoyable to women and not obviously male-orientated.

Universal studios

Matsuura-san has his own theory on the adoption of *PaRappa* and the rhythm action genre by women. "The videogame industry is mainly targeted to the male audience. But I think the music genre doesn't isolate female players so much, and that's where we should take gaming and its genres, towards a universally enjoyed experience. I think there's a very laddish image attached to gaming culture, which doesn't seem welcoming or appealing to girls. I generally think female players are happy to enjoy uplifting games regardless of its genre while males may have a problem with experimenting with less stereotypical games in front of peers."

Director of the PS2 conducting rhythm action title *Mad Maestro*, **Hiroyuki Kotani**, agrees, "I think rhythm action has two threads of appeal; to satisfy our desire to control the body as seen in playing sports, and to provide feelings of pleasure or even emotions like relief. But while most games satisfy desires such as intellectual curiosity and the fighting spirit among male players, music games provide something more universal. With music, girls and boys support it equally. And using characters like PaRappa, Sony has opened up videogames to girls and music games to the world."

It seems that *PaRappa* had started something so new that no other developers had any such projects in the pipeline at the time of *PaRappa*'s release. Then in 1998, after a suitable gestation period for forward-looking developers, two key titles hit the market: one for PlayStation and one for the arcade.

Simon says dance

Enix, a publisher best known for its stunning (yet rarely seen by western eyes) Japanese RPG catalogue, took a chance with occasional arcade developer Metro (most famously known in Japan for 1993's *Sky Alert*) who had developed a title based on *PaRappa*'s Simon Says rhythm premise but using the medium of dance rather than scripted rap. Both *Bust-a-Move* (known as *Bust-a-Groove* in the west) and *PaRappa* had the benefit of excellent and exceptionally memorable soundtracks.

This element was clearly very important to a music game, as it was the catchy musical element combined with tight gameplay that would prove a double-pronged draw to players. In the arcade, things had to be more musically overt and familiar to attract the crowds and so throughout 1997, developer Konami acquired top J-pop and dance music licences for use in its new rhythm action-based titles.

In 1998 Konami released three key titles in Japan, *Beatmania*, *Dance Dance Revolution* (and its sequel) and *Guitar Freaks*. The key difference between these titles and the home consoles was the scale and scope of the machines and their appropriate peripherals. The Japanese had come full circle. Here, in the arcade scene, were the dancing equivalents of karaoke boxes. The social aspects and laws that made karaoke and para para such popular musical means of expression had been distilled and introduced to the arcade scene. Almost overnight a craze was born to take the place of para para for the arcade generation.

Developers as diverse as SNK (*Cool Cool Toon*) and Namco (*Taiko No Tatsujin*) launched their own unique titles off the bandwagon and the relationship between music and games was forever changed.

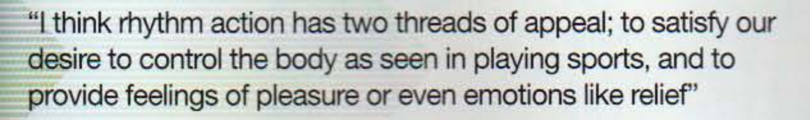
Pop culture

The reasons as to why rhythm action games, both at the arcade and at home, are popular are immediately obvious to anyone who has introduced them to friends and family. With little need for in-depth instruction, once the basics have been learned a player can enjoy any of the various machines/games and musical styles. Someone with a competent sense of rhythm but no musical technique can play guitar, drum, keyboard or maraca in a safe environment.

This has been a double-edged sword, particularly for the arcade machines, which have frequently been attacked for featuring simplistic gameplay. Konami has largely risen to the challenge and the rhythmic complexity of its various series has escalated with each release to frightening proportions. The fact is that the beat detector never lies and this can be intimidating for competent real-life musicians who object to having their rhythmic competence marked by a 'toy' (**Edge** has one high-profile musician friend who refuses to play *Taiko No Tatsujin* for this very reason).

These are communal games encouraging competition and community right from the top tier arcade players down to family gatherings. The games provide a framework for exuberant showing off between freestyling *Pump It Up* players while being universal enough to allow for child-friendly Disney endorsements. This is something few traditional gaming genres can lay claim to. **Yukio Shimomura**, director of *Gitaroo Man* offers his explanation, "Music is something that enjoys a certain universal appeal, so the essence behind the genre is simple to grasp. I think maybe that's why games like *Dance Dance Revolution* and *Guitar Freaks* have such mainstream appeal."

These are games that anyone and everyone can attempt and there is no age restriction with the genre. And of course there is the appeal of songs. While *Gran Turismo* has long realised the importance in licensed music to enhance its products, nowhere else is such musical familiarity so pertinent to the player.



"I think rhythm action has two threads of appeal; to satisfy our desire to control the body as seen in playing sports, and to provide feelings of pleasure or even emotions like relief"

The combination of these factors has enabled rhythm action, particularly in the form of *Dance Dance Revolution* and its thirdparty plastic mats, to become one of videogaming's most valuable diplomats to the western mainstream. There is still much ground to break, however, as only a smattering of arcade-to-home conversions make it to the PAL regions.

The prohibitive cost and niche market of titles such as *Taiko No Tatsujin* and *Guitar Freaks* have meant that Konami has been reticent to dive in, but this doesn't change the fact that here is a videogame that parents can buy for their children and then join in with rather than ignore. The accompanying peripheral can be a comfortingly recognisable object compared to the alien mystery that is the joypad to a bemused parent. But whether the genre can ever regain the dizzy heights of widespread salaryman attraction in homeland Japan is perhaps unlikely.

The number of music-related games that have dived at retail from *Rez* through *Samba* to *Frequency* has almost assured that the days of music-based peripherals securing PAL release are over. But already the genre has established itself deep enough to retain a key place in gaming's canon and if it continues to encourage more people to discover gaming's universal appeal through the generations, then may the beat go on.





Rhythm action has gone out of fashion in Japanese arcades, but there are still some excellent amateur recordings of freestyling experts to be found online













Logic 3's new metal dance mat (above) boasts excellent build quality and could take the genre to the next level in the UK mainstream. Evidence since its recent launch suggests that punters are not being put off by the £125 price tag

> Witness the future

The health benefits of rhythm action have been well documented in the US. While they only relate to titles that require bodily action they have helped promote the genre as a beneficial tool for weight loss. In particular *Dance Dance Revolution* has been promoted on college campuses as a tool for both building community and fitness. The on-campus arcades serve as incentives for students to pursue their education at that particular college, something that is, unsurprisingly, yet to be taken up by the UK higher education system. According to DDRfreak.com the arcades on colleges like Cal Berkeley, UC Davis, UCLA, San Jose State and others bring in money from students needing to loosen up and have some fun after hours of gruelling study.

The health benefits of bemani have been incorporated into the Californian schooling system where some institutions have incorporated *DDR* into their physical education programs. **Chad Fenwich**, a coach at Patrick Henry Middle School near Los Angeles is quoted on DDRfreak.com as saying, "The key is to get children interested in getting physically fit and staying that way for life." The possible health benefits are clear: one *DDR* song, 'Max 300', is 88 seconds long and, set on 'maniac', requires 578 steps. That works out to an average of six steps per second. Some home iterations of the game right from the Dreamcast version of *DDR 2nd Mix* contain a calorie counter to indicate to the player approximate calorie's being burned. Such benefits have been frequently negated due to outrageous and dangerous freestyling that has gone wrong.






Daily Fraud
GTA
TURNED MY
SON EVIL

Public Revelations

In the modern era of multimillion-pound development budgets and a congested software market, PR matters to publishers like never before. Games hitting the big-time means expensive, all-or-nothing media blitzes – and, in a few cases, 95-or-nothing review score 'agreements'. Edge tries to avoid the spin and discover who's playing whom…

A week is a long time in public relations. In the space of a few days in the middle of March, Nintendo fans tried to read the runes as a succession of lumbering high-street giants announced that they were cutting the price of the GameCube – a sequence culminating in Argos, the nation's favourite quick-fix Saturday superstore, offering a console, memory card and game for under £80.

The timing stunk. Only ten months after a bright launch and with *Metroid Prime* just around the corner, it sounded like a fire sale. Those not content to shrug the strategy off knew from past experience that such conspicuously-signalled doubts about a console's viability are capable of setting in motion its domino-effect demise. It was a PR disaster.

A week on, Argos' marketing director was quoted as declaring a rethink of his firm's decision to phase out the console – demand for cut-price Cubes had been "unbelievable." The timing was perfect. People power had disproved the number-crunchers' logic and won the machine back its catalogue slot, and the accompanying attention ensured that both the machine and *Metroid Prime* topped their respective charts. It was a PR triumph.

In recent years, devoted gamers have become accustomed to talking about PR, and its evil twin marketing, with the kind of fervour they used to reserve for celebrating *Street Fighter II* high scores or pounding to record wins in *Daley Thompson's Decathlon*. Some distraught veterans seem to blame PR for all of gaming's contemporary ills.

You don't have to hold such extreme opinions to see that PR in games is more important now than it has ever been. As those ELSPA press releases never tire of reminding UK gaming journalists, more games than ever are being sold. There are signs all round that titles such as *Vice City* have taken the medium within touching distance of the status and big-money glitz of music and film. In the current contest for UK console success, with two young machines playing catch-up to the all-conquering market leader and serious new arrivals such as Nokia keen to make an impact, games PR is a higher-stakes business than ever – whether you're getting it right or doing it wrong. "PR's become a lot more professional, and PRs have had to become a lot more reactive," says **Rob Fahey**, editor of Website Gamesindustry.biz "Five or six years ago, if you made a mistake, there'd be a little piece in 'CTW' taking the piss the following week. Now, it could mean you knock £100,000 off your company's stockmarket value."

In the most basic conceptual sense, though, the function of games PR has not changed. On a day-to-day level, it's still concerned with getting images, information, access and code to journalists and giving the games being worked the best possible prospects in the market. Longer-term, the aim is still to change attitudes to games and gaming, and finding new ways and new places to spread the word.

In the world of glossy magazines, the PR-media axis is vital. Just like the companies whose products they promote, glossy magazines and PR organisations exist because they make money. PR companies survive by maintaining and enlarging their client lists, which can only be achieved by getting the required coverage within the agreed budgets. Magazines survive by differentiating themselves from the competition, which can only be done by securing unique content – interviews, pictures, photoshoots, early review material, previously unannounced news – with the help of PR people.

This is even more pronounced in the UK than elsewhere for several historical reasons. Most importantly, compared to the US, where the majority of magazine readers have always been subscribers (little surprise given that subscribers' discounts of up to 60 per cent on cover prices have long been standard there), selling your magazine with its cover, and all the exclusive promises it makes, is vital in the UK – month in, month out. Also crucial is the fact that British lifestyle and entertainment journalism has always been done relatively on the cheap, which means that the average magazine is dependent on gifts of free stuff – travel, stacks of CDs and books, gadgets, competition prizes, the lot – to fill its pages. Stuff it simply couldn't afford to pay for itself.

It's an open secret that many fashion magazines are obliged to feature major advertisers' product in their editorial. Mere mortals get to interview Premiership footballers by grovelling to companies who make their boots or shampoo when there's a new design being readied for release. Every week, journalists who crassly plug products but don't cover their tracks are named and shamed in 'Private Eye'. There are questionable relationships everywhere, but there's no law against any of it, and you can never know that your suspicions aren't wrong, because in the end all such divergences of opinion can be put down to just that – opinion.

Behind closed doors "The PR company which handles a massive gaming brand in the UK came to our office to pitch for a new account unrelated to videogames. As part of their presentation, they showed us photographs of events they'd staged in the past. They paused to apologise as they revealed a picture that they felt might make them look bad. 'They're the games journalists,' they explained. 'We had to invite them. A bunch of ugly, mole-eyed freaks, but they're okay really.'" Anon

The games industry suffers less from these problems than many others – but when they do happen, they're easier to spot, because games are different. There's no real equivalent in music, film or fashion of a buggy, barely playable, insultingly unfinished game. There's no comparable tradition of feuding formats, and there's no album that comes on one disk but takes 40 hours to listen to right to the end. As a result, games magazines occupy a peculiar position – they've traditionally been stranded somewhere between being 'Which?'-style consumer watchdogs and partisan fanzines. No wonder games PR is a uniquely complicated – and sometimes messy – business.

In the early days of videogames PR, the small-time, dedicated image of great British bedroom coders was mirrored by the work of those promoting their games, and echoed in the spirit of the pioneering magazines with which they collaborated. In the mid-'80s, the industry was young, full of delights and future promise, but it was still you against the world. The industry was regarded as a threat to the nation's moral health, up there with video nasties. If you went looking for coverage beyond the world of gaming, you didn't expect much. You'd want to get your game in even the most scaremongering story, recalls **Alison Beasley**, who went on to co-found games PR firm Mitchell Beasley, "because that was all there was."

Those who did want to dip a toe into the big time had to pay. **Simon Harvey** of BHPR started his own firm – "arguably, the first dedicated games PR company" – in 1987. "Before that," he recalls, "people would generally end up going to an expensive, corporate London PR company who did everything else – cars, health food, what have you – too." The great early shift in perception which he witnessed was with the early stages of the current age of plug-in-and-play home gaming. "Consoles changed the whole story. Until they came along, games had been bracketed as an element of 'computers' and 'computing'. Things like the Amiga were great, but there were still wires and disk drives to worry about, and gaming had always been seen as a special interest – 'hobbyist' and that kind of thing. Consoles pushed it into the public consciousness as part of the entertainment world.'

Back then, there were occasional opportunities to ensnare the mainstream – Harvey recalls promoting the notorious 18-certificate *Jack the Ripper* game to hacks in a the Spitalfields pub his victims once frequented – but they were few, and precious. Come the 1990s, though, supernerds like Bushnell, Sinclair and Sugar had been eclipsed as gaming icons by Sonic and Mario. Sega spent millions alerting Europe to a new era, sponsoring the British Grand Prix and working the high street until games were welcomed – as opposed to merely tolerated – there. Nintendo and Sega's golden years changed everything. In the middle of the decade, Sony built on that breakthrough and changed everything again.

First things first: the PlayStation was a great machine, which became host to many great games, and one of SCEE's crucial accomplishments was simply letting people know it. They sent out machines on a unprecedented scale and got software to more people than anybody had before.

But there was more to it, too. There's an increasing revisionist tendency which writes off all the talk about Sony's PR nous and dismisses as insignificant the impact of the club culture crossover, but for those who witnessed the process from the lifestyle side of the divide, something significant did seem to be happening. A console was becoming seen not merely as a slightly sad toy, or even a grown-up gadget, but as an idea. Not just something you wanted to buy, but something that was, to use the magic word for every glossy magazine, aspirational – something that said something about somebody you wanted to be.

Steve Beale was the founding editor of upstart style magazine 'Sleaze Nation', which worked with Sony on special supplements and other sponsorship arrangements in the late-'90s. He says that their relationship certainly primed the magazine to be aware of what PlayStation had to offer – "We were nice to them all the time" – but not in too crude a way. "It was difficult to be randomly nice about a computer game, it was much more about long-term sympathy with the form." And again, it was a two-way street, because, unlike the man in the tent waiting for his pre-release *Turok*, the PR had a logical relationship with the big Sony games. "They didn't only make promises about being relevant, they delivered on them," he says. "They gave us what we wanted – drug references, dance music – in the promotion and in the games. The brand was so well-defined that the only other company up there with Sony for that demographic was Levi's."

With Sony having repositioned videogames as edgy, anti-authority

You plonker "My boss promised/threatened to put his 'plonker on the table' if ever we got a 100 per cent review. Well, shortly after that rash statement Cathy [Campos] opened up 'The One' and screamed in delight – *Xenon 2* had scored 100 per cent. We both ran into the boss's office – interrupted his meeting, slammed the magazine down in front of him and told him to put his plonker on the table. He was gobsmacked but luckily for us he wasn't a man of his word – either that or he did get it out and we didn't notice." Alison Beasley


WipEout



The trickle down factor

Once upon a time games PR consisted of a programmer taking his game to a magazine or fanzine and demoing it over coffee and biscuits. If the game was good (read for this 'works') a smudgy screenshot would accompany a 200-word review. Things have changed. And not always for the better. Here's how big games are PR'd in the modern world, from first shot to shop shelves:

Stage 1. Game is announced, accompanied by a breathless and insight-lite press release. A handful of screenshots facilitate magazine news stories, and first contact for the readers.

Stage 2. A few more shots are made available, often looking suspiciously staged/rendered or in too high a resolution to be true. These are the basis for the 'first look' features that appear in most magazines.

Stage 3. First footage is disseminated onto the Internet (and hence cover disks), along with some more screenshots and titbits of information. Magazines 'update'.

Stage 4. The game debuts at a press event, whether dedicated to the title or as part of a larger trade show. The press bring you 'Played It' previews.

Stage 5. Exclusive 'hands-on' previews, in-depth and lasting several pages, are proffered to the press on exclusive bases. Depending on the pro of the title, this is last contact before review.

Stage 6. Review code, often timed to coincide with the street date of the recipient magazine is released. Official magazines often have the first review. If a game is rotten, code will be held bac in order to minimise negative coverage, unless a magazine offers a flattering score in advance.

Stage 7. You buy it, or not.

Canned goods

"The Dutch office of a major publisher negotiated an exclusive cover for its million-selling espionage-themed adventure... with three magazines. None of them knew that two other magazines were doing the same thing, until one day before deadline. Two out of three canned their cover." Anon

entertainments – enscapsulated by Sasha spinning tunes while PlayStation flyers with reference to narcotics did the rounds – post-PlayStation shock tactics were briefly in vogue. Getting the likes of Max Clifford to exploit tabloids for a game such as *Grand Theft Auto*, which ticked all the right/wrong 'Daily Mail' boxes, was so effective and transparent that it quickly became tiresome and low-rent – at the time, one PR even grumbled that handling one such game meant that publishers subsequently only approached him when they wanted a 'nasty' campaign. That school of nasty soon disappeared, but there was no immediately obvious replacement for it, or for any of the methods Sony had pioneered; in certain respects, games PR has been treading water ever since.

Of the pressures and complications that affect games PR today, a good number always have done. And, despite, the proliferation of media coverage, they still apply primarily to the specialist press, because the right review remains the gold standard in publicity for many PRs and publishers. In the world of games media, where many PRs started as journalists and many veteran journalists have established strong friendships with PR professionals, complications often apply at an individual level. "It's a close-knit industry," says Fahey, "and so you do feel bad if you're giving a score that you think is going to get a friend in trouble."

But if gentlemen's agreements between journalists and PR executives are a fading concern in the era of breaking Internet news, binding contracts about the specific details of coverage and review scores are an increasingly live one.

The first practice, one that has always gone on, is to fail to deliver code in time for pre-agreed magazine deadlines. This often happens simply because developers' optimistic predictions can leave PRs in the lurch when the date passes and the game's not complete – but even then, the urge to smooth things over can be counterproductive. "If they actually said they do not have the code to give me just yet, instead of a flat-out lie saying that they've got it on their desk and it'll be in the post tomorrow, that would make things so much smoother," says one magazine staffer.

When more sinister motives are suspected and a game, usually a bad one, makes it to the shops without a single review to its name, the sense of injustice – to the principles of reviewing and to the buying public – is even more pronounced. Instead of moaning about it, though, the brave do have other options. At Irish videogame magazine 'G4' in the late-'90s, staff would keep a log of due dates for review code. When games failed to appear and subsequent enquiries proved fruitless, the magazine would list all withheld titles in the issue the reviews should have appeared in.

If such tricks are seen by journalists as shabby and bad-mannered, the one approach to managing coverage which generates genuine anger in journalists is the brazen preordination of review scores by PR departments.

Late last year, when a particular title was top of the wanted list of gamers across Europe, a continental single-format magazine featured a lengthy explanation of the absence of a review of the title. The article explained that the magazine had previously turned down an opportunity to review another of the publisher's games on the publisher's terms, bought a copy on its release, and given it 65 per cent. Coincidentally or otherwise, the magazine was not approached when arrangements for exclusive 'first looks' of the bigger game were made. Then, the article relayed the requirements made of one of the selected magazines which were: "Two covers, a certain amount of preview and review coverage and a minimum score of 95 per cent. That last thing came as quite a shock." It is, regrettably, just one of numerous anecdotes that could be relayed here.

While the score-massaging journalist has to account to his readers, the games PR often has a more fearsome force to contend with. When it comes to pressure for ridiculously high marks, hell hath no fury like a short-fused publisher whose bad game gets bad reviews. "By and large," says Harvey, "people will score as they see. But you will always get those publishers who will transfer the responsibility for a product's success onto the PR company. They'll say to them, 'Everything's in place: ads, point-of-sale, a firm release date. The only way this can fail now is if the PR's not right.'"

Beasley tells a tale that all game PRs will sympathise with. "'Ace' [magazine] used to use graphs with a 'Predicted Interest Curve.'

A matter of lifestyle and death

"I was once talking to someone from 'Loaded' who told me that videogame PR people are 'absolute psychopaths.' He'd reviewed one of the games for the mag and slated it; rightly so, considering which game it was. But the PR person attached to this game gave him utter hell because of it, like they seem to think that a bad review in 'Loaded' somehow dooms their game to certain failure, despite it only being 50 words in an obligatory afterthought of a reviews section that seems to hold as much sway as a cobweb. And this, to be honest, stinks. To be disowned by PR people as they clamber after that empty promised land of PR coverage – 100 words in a men's mag seems to be far more important than six pages and an in-depth consideration in a specialist games mag, despite it having zero sway among the gaming audience – is absolutely disgusting." Anon

D-list disrespect "We heard that Nintendo was going to have a big launch for the GBA SP – but not from them. When we called to enquire, they admitted it was going on, but said the event was not for the specialist press – as far as we could make out, it was crap celebrities who used to be on 'Eastenders' and tabloid journos all piling into a bash with booze, complimentary SPs, dinner and no specialist press. One of us was in the area and even tried to talk his way in, but failed. Soon after, the specialist press was sent a release retrospectively alerting them to the launch and asking them to cover the celebrity-studded event in their magazines and Websites. How we laughed." Anon

Gary Whitta was there at the time and he did a review of *Champions of the Raj* which was pretty accurate. The accompanying PIC graph started with a little upwards blip then went immediately steeply downward. In fact it went out of the graph and off the page. Cathy Campos and I thought it was hysterical – the game was duff and basically got what it deserved. However, our boss at Mirrorsoft thought different, came in shouting and waving his arms around and ordered us to phone up and ask for the review to be re-written. Complete nonsense, of course, but we had to make the call. So, we bit our lips – knowing that we couldn't do it with straight faces – and called up Gaz. Cathy spoke to him first. It was a short call, she just about held it together long enough to tell him that she thought he and his review were completely out of order before she slammed the phone down on him. He thought that she must be really angry with him so he phoned me. I also told him that I was in total agreement with her and I hung up on him too. Poor guy! It took a while for us to convince him that we weren't seriously pissed off and only hung up so we could at least go to our boss and say that we'd given the journalist a talking to."

Bigger firms can often steer clear of bullies who look like trouble, but small outfits have to fight to keep clients in a competitive market, and can't always be so choosy. An example: UK firm buys poor also-ran sports game in from Japan, secures the costly services of a famous athlete to endorse it. Client expects miracles, and PR begs, flirts and self-deprecates down the phone to enough journalists that the mealy-mouthed reviews that do appear hover around and above the 5/10, 50 per cent area – a small triumph bearing in mind the wretchedness of the title and the obviously superior alternatives that already exist. Client sees review scores, is outraged and gives the PR an earful and attempts an injection of guilt. "You want a relationship with a client to be honest, " says the still-sore victim. "You want to be able to say to them, 'This is a decent game, we're confident it'll score in the '70s, or, 'It's crap. Don't send it out for review.'"

It's difficult to know whether the PR tone of the current generation hardware has really been found yet. The hallmarks of the PlayStation era – clubs, urban sports events, festivals, getting product to all the right people – were so effective that they have since become cliches of youth marketing – "naff" in the words of Beale. We're still trudging along on the quest for alternatives, and it's a problematic one. Early on in PS2's life, for example, SCEE got involved in boutique publicity projects so avant-garde that their external press office seemed to have trouble getting its head around them.

Elsewhere, lazy assumptions about who benefits most from modern PR power are often misplaced. EA Sport's major brands and its parent company's chart-crushing film licences have become so powerful and self-explanatory that, in the words of one journalist, "they don't really do PR anymore."

Going posh is one popular alternative to getting weird. This spring, Xbox's PR agency Red staged the Xbox Live launch at the Tate Modern and Nintendo and its PR agency Cake mounted a hipster-seeking exhibition similar with the GBA SP; Sony's *Primal* got its own exhibition at the ICA. Having found themselves left completely out of the loop on some recent celebrity-studded launches and last down the list at others, many game journalists are suspicious that this taste for the high-concept launch is marginalising the specialist press and its readers.

Harvey is helping ELSPA challenge ITC rules that restrict programming on games in ways that don't apply to other media, and launching the new 'Game Stars' awards – the fight goes on for some kind of equivalence to other media under the law and in the public eye. Other firms such as Kazoo have tried to bring pro FPS gamers and other wider aspects of the culture into the mainstream. "What people in PR should always seek to do is try to push things into new areas."

Remember that – and the fact that, to some degree, you owe the value, accessibility and range of today's games to PR's pushing. The work of PR might have introduced and bagged you that Mega Drive for Christmas. It is the work of PR that will spare you from being bullied when you come into work every morning raving about hanging with fairies in *The Wind Waker*. And then, on top of all that, remember to be vigilant out there. Things are not always as they seem.

Reality bites "If you do something different and it works, you can really make a significant impact and get a game seen in a new light. But when you do decide to do something bold and untried, there is always a chance it'll work the other way. I was questioned in relation to the murder of Jill Dando. We were promoting Rage's *Expendable* for PC. On the day she was shot, we had issued a fake anonymous death threat – albeit a kitsch one – to the press as a teaser for the game. It landed on 300 journalists' desks the day she was killed. On top of that, my car was the same model and colour as one of those being traced in connection with the crime." Simon Harvey


MAINSTREAM PRESS
& CELEBRITIES
GAME
JOURNALISTS
I want
an
SP
I ♥
NINTENDO

Truth one: There is no such thing as the definitive review.
Truth two: There is no such thing as an unbiased review.
Truth three: Magazines write for their readerships.
Truth four: Bribery is rife.
Truth five: Reviewers cannot play a game for long enough.
Truth six: There is no 'correct' score for a game.
Truth seven: Reviewers are not part of the videogame industry.

Points of review

From nought to revolutionary in just under 15 minutes: Edge looks at the laws of reviewing, and reveals the seven truths behind the hyperbole

"We gave this game to a self-professed 'hardcore' gamer who we'd been using for reviews for years," says an anonymous videogame journalist to **Edge**. "It was a GBA title, quite a difficult one, but he assured us he'd have no problems doing it over a weekend. Come Monday morning the review came in, 200 words, and read fine. It wasn't until a week later when I picked up the game to have a crack myself that I saw his saved game file. Thirteen minutes and 53 seconds."

Number of people on the game's team? It's a conservative guess, but let's say 20. And the time it took to be completed, from concept to final submission? Somewhere around a year. Thousands of hours go into creating the next episode of a big-name franchise, into producing a game that has the potential to sell millions. Of course, all that potential can amount to nothing in the face of bad word of mouth, and so much of that starts in the printed press, because words carry more gravitas when they're written down. And the precise – to within a second – amount of time it took reviewer X to appraise well regarded game Y? Thirteen minutes and 53 seconds.

It's time to come clean. Reviews are wholly about trust, and most magazines sell off the back of that trust. *This* is the definitive review. *Our* reviews are *completely* unbiased. The *only* review you'll ever need to read. **Edge**, in theory, is different, since it follows a different publishing model and attracts a different demographic, but in reality the first things to appear on the Web once an issue hits the shelves are the review scores, in simple list form, stripped of text and (potentially) meaning. But it's time to come clean, because if you can't tell the truth about something as simple as telling the truth...

The great experiment

To illustrate (or perhaps contradict) the subjective nature of reviewing, and to demonstrate (or, again, refute) just how easy it is to fool a paying audience, **Edge** decided to conduct a simple experiment. The magazine asked six reviewers to appraise Capcom's *P.N.03* within a mere quarter of an hour, and provide a 200-word **Edge**-style review at their leisure. The panel? In no particular order: Kieron Gillen, ex-deputy editor of 'PC Gamer' and unwitting inspiration behind The Gillen, a unit used to measure pretentiousness; Owain Bennallack, editor of 'Develop' magazine, who claims to be able to accurately assess a game's score within 15 minutes; Zy Nicholson, a veteran freelance game journalist whose catalogue of work is too great to abridge here, but whose reputation should precede him; Ste Curran, reviews editor at **Edge** for two years; Simon Byron, aka The Byronic Man, former editor of Amiga magazine 'The One', and now director at gaming PR firm Barrington Harvey; and Margaret Robertson, whose career in print game journalism begins with her piece here. Which piece? **Edge** isn't saying just yet, and hopes you'll feel free to play 'Guess the reviewer' over the next six pages, along with drawing your own conclusions from the (admittedly non-scientific) experiment (the impatient can turn to p106 now).

P.N.03

01

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£35)** Release: **Out now (Japan), Q3 (UK)**





Rhythmically tapping her foot as she surveys the first in a long series of robot battlefields, Vanessa Schneider clearly isn't the kind of operative who would tolerate a scratch in her shiny, figure-hugging Aegis Suit. If you're looking for a high concept behind this gymnastic shoot 'em up, dodging bullets with style is pretty much it.

Forget the staple motifs of stealth, puzzles and mission objectives we've come to expect from recent thirdperson shooters. *P.N.03* is a return to old-skool bot-blasting, but the ever-threatening crossfire from multiple moving enemies swiftly underlines the emphasis on mastering Vanessa's acrobatic flips, rolls and pirouettes to stay alive. Even with an auto lock-on to handle targeting, buying the space to return fire draws on every button to choreograph the destructive unleashing of her suit's 'Energy Drive'.

Given the premise, it's a shame those slick moves don't always string together quite as fluidly as they should in both controls and animation. It's also strange to find no rhythm action element, as the relentless pulse of perfunctory techno will convince all but the most maladroit to try shooting in tempo. But it's the joy of squeezing off shots between cartwheels, or punctuating a perfect cat-crouch landing with an enemy's incendiary demise, that provides *P.N.03*'s most rewarding moments.

Edge rating: Six out of ter

Truth one: there is no such thing as the definitive review. The words are anachronistic; reviews are critiques, and critiques are, ultimately, personal; definitive means a singular vision, but you can't wrap a single verdict around everyone's opinions on the first level of *Halo*, let alone the whole 20-hour adventure. You can try, but that means hedging your bets, diluting opinion with concessions to the tastes of others, padding out copy with indisputable facts. If you want those – all the facts, all the levels, enemies, playable characters, tracks and the number of different ways you can cross the ball, you can get that from a press release. But that won't be the definitive review. There is no definitive review.

Zy Nicholson, described lovingly as "the greatest game journalist of all time" by ex-**Edge** editor **Tony Mott**, believes that part of the problem is a reviewer's inability to see the future. "A definitive review would have to possess timeless qualities, and that presents a problem in our field. Just as every game is a product of its time, so every review needs to capture the zeitgeist to be able to speak to its readers. Were you to review *Space Invaders* today, couldn't you be more informative by placing it in history rather than pretending it had just been released? Reviewers of the time wouldn't have had the luxury of seeing what *Galaga* and *Galaxians* did with the format, and could be forgiven for stating that *Invaders* had no comparison. This is the luxury of hindsight."

"Conventional magazine science shows that readers don't enjoy reading verdicts that disagree with their own, or at least what they expect a game to get"

But that's not to say some reviews aren't better than others. "Videogame reviews aren't just about the art. They're also about the core utility," explains **Kieron Gillen**, a freelance journalist and ex-reviews editor of 'PC Gamer'. "For example, music has a far larger necessary subjective component. If music CDs sometimes started to skip, or a song broke down halfway or the box didn't open or something they'd be in a similar position to games. There are genuine technical and design problems that games can possess, and there are genuine facts and if a review alters or disguises them, it is a bad review."

Truth two: there is no such thing as an unbiased review. Bias is an innate part of critical opinion, because we like the things we like and loathe the things we don't, and that's what we're paid to represent in print. "Clearly, all reviews are biased," says Gillen. "Biases are human likes and dislikes. From something as simple as 'I don't like the colour brown' upwards, all biases will affect how someone enjoys the game and so affect the review." **Edge**'s deadpan response in a letters page of old ("Yes, **Edge** is biased. Biased towards good games.") isn't as throwaway as it might initially appear, provided you're already acquainted with **Edge**'s opinions on what makes a good game. *Ico* and *Rez*, for example. Which leads us to:

Truth three: magazines write for their readerships. Conventional magazine science shows that readers don't enjoy reading verdicts that disagree with their own, or at least what they expect a game to get. The disparity between the **Edge** score for *Jedi Knight II* (4/10) and 'PC Gamer's

P.N.03

02

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£35)** Release: **Out now (Japan), Q3 (UK)**

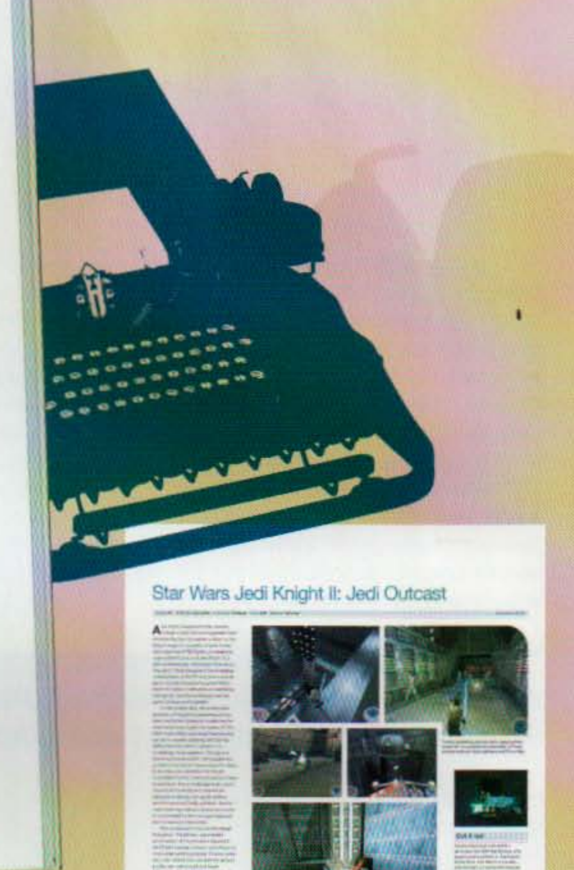




This is as deep as *P.N.03* gets. Vanessa Schneider, a beautiful mercenary hired by a mysterious stranger, shoots lasers from her hands. She shoots them at enemies, who, when their *Command & Conquer*-style bars have depleted, disappear with understated explosions. When they're all gone, she moves on and shoots some more. In game equation terms, it is *Cosmic Smash* plus *Smash TV* minus most of the Smash – paced like the techno that makes up its soundtrack, the game can prove frenetic, but, ultimately, it holds few surprises.

Despite that, a combo system (based, as is traditional, on the length of time Vanessa takes between enemies) elevates the game from mind-numbing blast/dodge duality into something more elegant. In essence, you are making Vanessa *dance*, racking up points so you can upgrade your suit to shoot better lasers, rack up more points, and so on. The nimble aerobics recall those of a 2D shooter, though the thirdperson view, with the now-traditional dizzying camera, removes some of that genre's visceral/visual thrill. But that's still what it is: an old-skool shooter as shallow as its story, disproving the notion that they don't make them like they used to. They do, and the world isn't worse off for their presence, but it's not significantly better for *P.N.03*'s, either.

Edge rating: Five out of ten



(94%) brought fury and forum damnation from the PC gaming community. The difference between **Edge**'s score for *Rez* (9/10) and 'PSM2's (66%) wasn't brought about by reviewers playing different versions, but by differences in the magazines' readerships. When you write something readers aren't expecting, something that doesn't match their preconceptions, there can be trouble.

Take **Edge**'s *Halo* review. Blessed with review code for an import title – a rarity, since most publishers will only distribute review code when the game is a month from shipping in Europe, often several months after it has appeared in the US or Japan – **E**105's review appeared on the shelves before almost anyone else in the country had a chance to play the game. The verdict, the first 10/10 since *Ocarina of Time*, was the most controversial in **Edge**'s history, and what should have been cause for celebration turned into a riot of disbelief: Microsoft's first release had secured the ultimate accolade, and accusations of bribery were rife.

"I was the most cynical person on the team," explains **Edge**'s reviewer. "I was absolutely unconvinced by every single thing I'd heard – even when one of us came



'PC Gamer' and Edge disagreed strongly about *Jedi Knight II*'s merits. 'Gamer's review called it "the most entertaining adventure set in that faraway galaxy since the original *Jedi Knight*." Edge said, "This isn't the game you're looking for"

back from X01 utterly in love with it. But by the end of the night, I'd sent an email to the rest of the editorial team." The email's subject was 'A definitive list of things wrong with *Halo* (so far)'. The body of the message was blank. "A few days later, I suggested it might be worth a ten. The word hung in the air. Everyone slowly turned around. I think it probably stopped the music on the office stereo."

"The ten was not given out lightly," concurs another member of the team. "When a score is potentially controversial, or if another member of the team fundamentally disagrees with the mark, we will discuss that game to make sure we get it 'right'. *Halo* caused us the most soul-searching." And gained the most criticism, at least until readers had a chance to play the game. Then the apoplexy subsided, replaced by, initially, grudging acceptance, then the same sort of unexpected love which gained the game a ten. The lesson? Move too far away from what your readers want, and you cause yourself problems, in the short term at least.

Truth four, again connected with all the others: bribery is rife. But not in the way you might imagine. "I was introduced to **Richard Teversham** at a party later in the year as, 'The Guy Who Wrote The *Halo* Review'," says **Edge**'s reviewer. "He grabbed my hand and wouldn't let go. 'I owe you my life,' was the first thing he said. That was as close as I came to receiving anything for the review, and I'm not sure the life of Microsoft's European marketing manager will get you anything free in GameStation."

Bribery is mostly more subtle than bundles of cash and white lines. Put yourself in the position of a videogame magazine editor. A fictional publisher – let's call them Publisher X – has the sequel to one of last year's biggest games, *Naughty Gangster Smash*, scheduled for release at the end of the year. It also has many, many inferior titles coming out between now and then. Your readers loved *Naughty Gangster Smash*, and are going to go crazy for *Naughty Gangster Smash 2*, and you know putting that game on the cover will put another 5,000 on your sales. But if your rival gets the exclusive...

And your rival will get the exclusive if you give *Generic Racer 3* the score it deserves, or blast *Firstperson Shooter* as just another firstperson shooter. "I remember walking into one magazine's offices the week after an issue appeared with 'The Best Game Ever' reviewed inside," says **Simon Byron**, a director at PR firm Barrington Harvey. "I asked whether I could have a look – its glowing 90 per cent-plus appraisal had made me keen to play it. The reaction I got was astonishing. 'We've got rid of it,' remarked the editor. 'It was rubbish.'" It happens.

Truth five: reviewers cannot play a game for long enough. Magazines are produced on finite budget and time constraints, and reviewing is a subsection of that. Every review produced in-house is time the reviewer hasn't spent on a different section, and every hour they spend playing the game is time they're not writing words to fill the mag. Freelancers are paid by the word, not according to time spent, so every moment they spend playing means their salary is dropping.

Byron again: "The issue of freelance really needs to be addressed. The amount on offer, sometimes as low as 10p a word (£60 a page), really doesn't make playing games for any proper period of time worthwhile, so I can imagine that some freelance reviewers do bash out copy as quickly as possible in order to boost their income." Examples? Look no further than the start of this article – another reason why **Edge**'s freelance pool is exceptionally small and sparsely used. Or take this one from Byron...

"I worked on a game last year where it was apparent that the reviewer spent just 90 minutes reviewing the title. It was a realtime strategy game, and we were able to monitor the time everyone spent on it – and his hour and a half included taking

"When a score is potentially controversial, or if another member of the team fundamentally disagrees with the mark, we will discuss that game to make sure we get it 'right'"

P.N.03

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£35)** Release: **Out now (Japan), Q3 (UK)**





Before every adventurer carried guns and every game implicitly inched closer towards a go-anywhere, do-anything ideal, *P.N.03* could have been labelled a shoot 'em up with no complaints. Today it's more likely to be judged – and harshly – by what it isn't.

For despite a foot-tapping sci-fi heroine, this isn't Lara Goes Lunar and the adventure doesn't involve exploring a world so much as pushing back your own limits to combine an initially clunky range of moves into an artful attack. Fixed forward and frozen when firing, that repertoire centres on ducking, jumping and strafing plus special attacks triggered off the D-pad. You'll barely turn, yet gradually you're less a cannon, more a balletic 'Matrix'-style assassin, springing from lasers at the last possible moment.

Moments count for everything here – and everything is the score. Killing multiple enemies within a time envelope gets rewarded. Destroy all enemies to clear a room – and a mid-level exit to a report card. Jarring? Compared to wandering around 'immersed' for 20 minutes looking for a key, perhaps. But games began by highlighting the player's skill as well as the developer's. Like *Rez*, *P.N.03* successfully evolves a game mechanic – kill better or die trying – that's been so watered down it's in danger of extinction.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten





Edge's review of *Halo* took place after some 40 hours of playtime, and much discussion within the editorial team. Is 40 hours enough? Did Edge get the score 'right'? And is a group verdict more valid than a singular opinion? Answers on a postcard...

P.N.03

04

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£35)** Release: **Out now (Japan), Q3 (UK)**





Despite the standard science-fiction trappings, *P.N.03* is an atypical shooter. It's a question of analogue versus digital expression: moves versus free movement. Shooters, in the classical form, are based on a relatively simple interaction which can be applied along a fine gradient. Conversely, *P.N.03*'s moves are compartmentalised, using a set distance both spatially and temporally. This leads to a game that often has a distinctly puzzle-like approach as the player has to work out the solution that's been worked into any given situation rather than finding their own route to the opposition's destruction.

While not an entirely novel approach, it's certainly the less common. Essentially, it turns the game into a long string of mini-boss encounters: observe what's happening, work out what to do and then *do* it. When you achieve this, it's a graceful experience as you effortlessly destroy those before you. Until then, however, it's undignified, repetitive death. This is a game that takes great joy in killing a player with a single blow. It has to, because a section simply becomes simple rote once the correct path to victory has been found, and so chooses frustration and unfairness over extreme transience. When freedom is so curtailed, it's all that they could possibly do: an explanation, but hardly an excuse.

Edge rating: Four out of ten

the screenshots." **Edge** hears stories like this from time to time, but it's how often it doesn't hear about them that's more interesting. It's much easier to hide how long you've spent on a game that doesn't have the tracking facilities built into an MMRPG.

"Naturally, the developer and I were livid," says Byron. "The reviewer in question reasoned that he'd spent as much time as he could, considering deadlines. He also explained that he'd spent some time logging into multiple accounts (which we also tracked) attacking himself to gauge a feel for combat. Which was an interesting way of looking at it, I guess. Especially considering this was a multiplayer game. If he'd been ask to review the game of chess, and decided to play it against himself, he'd no doubt conclude that it was flawed. I don't think that analogy is out of place here."

So how long is long enough? "Sometimes I know before I've unravelled the cellophane," says Nicholson, "But I'm cursed with an eternal optimism, a masochistic streak and a goldfish memory." Perhaps the easiest answer is when the writer feels confident their view on a game is unlikely to change. On the other hand, is a thoroughly tedious beginning to a game a significant enough flaw to render the rest of the experience redundant? Fellow veteran videogame journalist **Stuart Campbell** believes it might be, "Games and books take anywhere from eight to 50 hours to get to the end of, and given the limited leisure time of most people, they won't tend to persist with something they're not enjoying after, say, five hours. Therefore, if a game has a monumentally shit first five hours, it's perfectly fair that people would give up on it – it's supposed to be entertainment, not a gruelling job to be endured."

Campbell's five hours is a nominal figure. The mechanic behind *Tetris* is completely transparent from the moment you start playing it, but you won't have any idea of how long you'll keep playing it until the day you stop. You know exactly how *Samba de*



Not all games can be reviewed in the same way – *Samba de Amigo* requires booze and a party atmosphere

P.N.03

05

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£35)** Release: **Out now (Japan), Q3 (UK)**



If you're going to strip a game down to its basics – you move, you shoot – then its basics had better be fluid and beautiful. Capcom's cyber-ballet falls short. The controls, like a funked-up *Resident Evil*, allow you to run, turn and somersault, with sidestep and jump adding to your repertoire. However, each manoeuvre must be performed separately, and the animation snaps awkwardly from one set of moves to the next. Vanessa Schneider can only shoot when she's stationary, so combat consists of picking your spot, unleashing a quick volley, then cartwheeling to safety. Repeat as necessary. While the special attacks you collect throughout the game are dramatically balletic, it's galling that Vanessa is at her most impressive when you have no direct control over her.

The game still offers plenty of straight-ahead shooting satisfaction; with no ammunition to worry about, and an elegant powerup system, there are few distractions. But the stilted character movement is exacerbated by a camera which is willing to let you vault offscreen, and a automatic targeting system which is vague and unpredictable.

Despite Vanessa's finger-clicking cool, this is a game that don't got rhythm. Who could ask for anything more? **Edge** could.

Edge rating: Six out of te

Amigo's going to work after three minutes, but you won't have a clue how fun it can be until you play it in a room full of people. We baulk at Byron's tale of someone reviewing his game within an hour and a half, but if the failings were obvious enough – and, in his defence, the reviewer claims they were, listed by users on beta-testing boards across the Web – then why not? Maybe 90 minutes is okay to surmise tens of thousands of hours of code labour. Maybe 13 minutes and 53 seconds is. Maybe we're all fooling ourselves trying to fool you.

But even beyond foggy questions of moral decency, there is also something more to some games than punching your timecard and putting in the requisite amount of hours towards completion. Defined in the latest issue of videogame fanzine 'Blessed' (www.blessedmagazine.com), downtime is the time players spend playing around in the gameworld, exploring through choice, curiosity and delight. "When you review games for a living," writes 'Xbox Gamer's reviews editor **Steven Bailey** in the article, "downtime is a luxury, but one that could very much amplify your love for a certain title."

A good player can see all of *Rez*'s levels within a couple of hours. *Ico* is over within eight. But even on games as objectively linear as these, the time a player spends in downtime – lost in the world, trying different things out, just admiring the view – is difficult to experience within the confines of a time-constricted review. And, more to the point, how can you quantify the multi-faceted and fundamentally absorbing experience of either in a single number?

Truth six: as much as **Edge** laboured over the number at the end of the *Halo* review, there is no 'correct' score for a game, only scores that cause less of an argument when reprinted on the Net and culled into a statistical database. It is impossible to please everyone; only to make some people happier than others as they apply mathematical rules to a verbal argument. "Having scores allows a legion of scholastic-minded score lawyers to attempt to establish some sort of **Edge** cosmological hierarchy," says an **Edge** employee. The shift in how verdicts are represented (see Testscreen, this issue) may go some way to changing that.

"Magazines are supposed to be entertaining. Any fuckwit can have an opinion. It's the quality of the expression of it that makes a magazine worth paying for"

But scoring systems, loathed by so many, can be (potentially) useful. Campbell puts the case for them thus, "I've never quite understood what people have against scoring. Obviously it's a vanity thing for journalists, we want people to read our lovingly-crafted words, instead of just reducing all that work to a single number. If used properly, scores are an effective and efficient method of communicating."

The problem is they rarely are. Campbell continues, "For a variety of reasons, none of them good ones, the curve is massively distorted in favour of the upper half of the range, and especially the first part of the upper half, ie scores between roughly six and eight.

"It makes it impossible to distinguish between huge ranges of games, which in turn leads to people only buying the few that breach the nine or ten barrier, which leads to the hugely unbalanced hit-or-bust thing that's been crippling the industry creatively for years." Why does that distortion happen? Because of truths one to six, partially. But there's also another reason: truth seven.

Truth seven: game reviewers are not in the industry, but many of them think they are. This is a problem, since it breeds loyalty. Journalists should not be evangelists for the industry that they cover, nor should they consider themselves part of it. The problem is that gaming finds itself under attack from all sides – friends, the media, politicians, The Mainstream with capital letters – so people covering it find themselves writing on the defensive. But game journalists should be journalists first and game fans second, providing perspicacious commentary on an evolving art, documenting the success and failures of the medium. That doesn't disqualify enthusiasm, just tempers it and removes the self-righteousness.

Edge's attitude is often seen as overly cynical, even anti-gaming, but in fact it's just trying to provide a service for readers who don't need to be told that every big game for their platform(s) of choice is fantastic. Besides, discussion of a game's failures is important to gaming's evolution, and Nicholson believes this reveals an important semantic difference between critics and reviewers. "To the critic, a bad game is as interesting and important to assess as a good one. To a reviewer, it is to be ignored at best or mentioned in warning at worst."

P.N.03

06

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£35)** Release: **Out now (Japan), Q3 (UK)**





P.N.03 gets to the point quickly. Stab A repeatedly to cycle through the menus and it's into the action proper – a refreshing change, making a mockery of today's CGI-obsessed developers. Unfortunately, this button-bashing proves prophetic as, ultimately, there's little more to the game.

Despite its pretensions, *P.N.03* is a 2D shooter dressed in *Tomb Raider* clothing, set to a mesmerising dance soundtrack. Navigating the terrain is cumbersome, the camera is a little too fussy. A short burst across the landscape and a wave of enemies appears, requiring rapid attention. But whereas the game is begging for some kind of wonderfully choreographed action set-pieces, the staccato control – you can't move while shooting – is a nod to gaming of old. It's *Space Invaders*, with a dash of *Robotron*. Move. Fire. Fire. Move. Progress to next area. Repeat.

Which is a shame. The combo system encourages fast play, but locking on is unwieldy and confrontation is kept simple to accommodate the interface. Sure, the threat does increase – with later levels requiring rhythm action precision – but it never excites as much as it promises.

GameCube exclusives should do more than this. It's stylish, but hardly hardware-intensive. Periodically enjoyable, but never quite there. *P.N.04*, if it comes, has a lot to redress.

Edge rating: Five out of ten


REZ

From the goofy Space Channel 5 to the beats and binary wirescapes of a 3D shoot-em-up with delusions of grandeur.

CHOICE

66

This major-label cynicism has brought the magazine the reputation of being for hardcore gamers, but that's wrong. **Edge** is a magazine for *adults*, and the writing in the reviews section is tailored to reflect that. Hence multiple boxouts, a magazine convention brought in to please those with attention deficit disorder, are considered redundant. Equally, it is presumed that those who need to know the game's most banal of peripheral statistics will have the capacity to check elsewhere, where they'll undoubtedly be listed in anal detail.

"Striving to say everything about the game – not in a boring factual list sense, but absolutely summing it up in a concise manner – should be a reviewer's goal," says Gillen. "I always recall Owain [Bennallack, editor of 'Develop' and former **Edge** deputy editor] nailing *The Sims* with '*The Sims* is an apologia for Consumerism.'" And, ultimately, that should be the aim, regardless of any of The Truths, and particularly disregarding what your readers expect – creating something elegant, informative and thought-provoking. Campbell concludes, "Magazines are supposed to be entertaining. Any fuckwit can have an opinion. It's the quality of the expression of it that makes a magazine worth paying for."


Rez

While Edge called *Rez*, "A staggeringly enjoyable experience," with "demonstrable cultural significance," 'PSM2' said, Mizuguchi-san's opus was "high concept gaming at its most self conscious – if it were a pair of jeans it'd have turn-ups the size of Belgium and a dot.com trust sewn into the crotch"

Edge's review policy

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. **Edge**'s rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten. Scores broadly correspond to the following sentiments: zero: nothing, one: disastrous, two: appalling, three: severely flawed, four: disappointing, five: average, six: competent, seven: distinguished, eight: excellent, nine: astounding, ten: revolutionary.

Edge's most played

Super Monkey Ball

Monkey Bowling proved to be the initial attraction, but **Edge** was soon delicately but decisively making its way through the game's fiendish 50 Expert levels.



(GameCube) Nintendo

Metroid Prime

We weren't obliged to play the PAL version of Metroid Prime, but taking just one more journey through Retro's stunningly realised alien world is never a chore.



(GameCube) Nintendo

Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo

It's more random than *Tetris* and less cerebral than *Chu Chu Rocket*'s puzzle challenges, but *Super Puzzle Fighter II* is the next best puzzle game on GBA.



(Game Boy Advance) Capcom

Zelda: A Link To The Past

Most ten-year-old games disappoint upon revisitation; not *A Link to the Past*. It's easily the best sprite-based *Zelda*, and surely warrants another 2D outing...



(Game Boy Advance) Nintendo

Ten is a magic number

To score or not to score

Speed dating is all the rage. The reason is simple: life is so hectic that we don't have time to mess around with endless chat, blind date trauma and, God forbid, courting. Besides, within 15 seconds you can tell if you're going to enjoy someone's company, so why risk an evening of uncomfortable silences?

Which, unfortunately, is how many journalists treat the art of game reviewing. Given that a magazine reviews 15-20 games a month, and an individual writer plays around five of those games, it's forgivable if they cut corners to deliver copy in on time, right?

Wrong. Games hardly ever show their full potential straight away. Games are multi-faceted and complex. For the most part they are crafted by huge teams and at great expense. They deserve as much cultural importance as films, but are more complicated to review. And it's not just that games generally last far longer than two hours, it's that they also demand great skill and concentration to master and evaluate.

The testscreen section of **Edge** is the core of the magazine. Not only is a review the culmination of all the news, events and previews over the lifespan of a game's creation but it's the result of two years or so of graft by a development team. **Edge** does not speed review. If a game can't adequately be reviewed before our deadline, it will be held over. As our Points of Review feature shows (see p76), it's all too easy to write a convincing review after just 15 minutes, but getting the score right... that's another matter entirely.

Scores are a subject close to **Edge**'s, and most of our readers' hearts. Not a month goes by without someone suggesting we drop them. So this month we did. Kind of. For us the text is paramount, and it's annoying to see forum debates about scores before people have even read the review, yet there's no doubt that a score can crystallise an opinion and help place games into a value scale. Others would argue that this is exactly what is wrong with a rating system.

This month you won't find a score at the foot of the testscreens. Hopefully you'll find this experiment thought provoking and challenging. Your opinions on the matter are always welcome.









Soul Calibur II (GC, Xbox, PS2)
p088
Amplitude (PS2)
p092
Silent Hill 3 (PS2)
p094
P.N.03 (GC)
p096
Eve Online: The Second Genesis (PC)
p097
Breath of Fire: Dragon Quarter (PS2)
p098
Dodonpachi: Dai-Ou-Jou (PS2)
p099
MotoGP: URT2 (Xbox)
p100
Clock Tower 3 (PS2)
p101
Vietcong (PC)
p102
Made in Wario (GBA)
p103
Golden Sun: The Lost Age (GBA)
p103
WWII: Frontline Command (PC)
p104
Dynasty Warriors 4 (PS2)
p104
Warrior Kings: Battles (PC)
p105
Medieval: Total War – Viking Invasion (PC)
p105
Tao Feng: Fist of the Lotus (PS2)
p106
The Testscreen Scores
p106



Soul Calibur II

Format: GC, Xbox, PS2 (all versions tested) Publisher: Namco Developer: In-house Price: ¥6,800 (£35) Release: Out now (Japan), September (UK)







Spawn and Link are stronger platform-specific additions than Heihachi (above). All other screenshots are from the GameCube version



The original *Soul Calibur*, on Dreamcast, has yet to be matched, in terms of quality at least, by any other 3D beat 'em up franchise. It's got an intuitive set of controls, a set of playable characters that are each unique and yet whose fortes and flaws are supremely balanced, an almost unprecedented range of moves, fully 3D movement, a considered blend of combos and tactics, and an extensive singleplayer campaign that accesses a multitude of unlockables. And, of course, it has those sublime graphics. Every other successful beat 'em up has some or all of these in varying amounts. But none has them to such a degree, or blends them together with quite such excellent results as Namco's brawler.

"The combat system remains the most finely honed of all the big-name beat 'em ups, with a depth that's simply missing from rival titles"

So would it be a bad thing if the inevitable sequel *only* offered more of the same? It's just that, to the untrained eye, that's what Namco has delivered. The basic Arcade mode, unsurprisingly, remains exactly the same; eight stages, best of three rounds each, reaching climax with the chameleon combat skills of Inferno. And it's unlikely to take longer than a couple of hours to beat it on the default, singleplayer difficulty level. Survival and Time Attack modes are also present and correct and, throughout, the fundamental game mechanics and control remain pretty much intact.

That's not necessarily a bad thing, of course, since the combat system remains the most finely honed of all the big-name beat 'em ups: combos are intuitive and tactics are just as important as rote learning of mechanical button sequences, with convincing 3D movement adding a strategic depth that's simply missing from rival titles. This impressive degree of tactical scope is further expanded by the sheer number of moves that each character possesses, along with a remarkably subtle blocking and counter-attacking system. And then there's the fact that the quick close-combat skills of a character such as Taki are as far removed from the long-reached bludgeoning of Astaroth, as they are from the idiosyncratic and, frankly, odd, fighting style of Voldo. And yet, as was the case with *Soul Calibur*, the game's character roster provides an inordinately balanced playing field for multiplayer competition.

But the extensive singleplayer campaign is similarly intact – this time called Weapon Master mode, and demonstrating just as much ingenuity and imagination as that of its predecessor. While early missions serve as a tutorial, later missions require an increasingly

Previously in E104, E121











Weapon Master mode provides players with a singleplayer experience of unparalleled depth and ingenuity for a beat 'em up, and allows an exhaustive selection of extras to be unlocked – including new weapons for the Extra modes





Notable additions to the character roster include Necrid and Raphael, and the mix retains a finely balanced range of combat styles and moves

sophisticated understanding of the game's tactical nuances by imposing a succession of different constraints upon combat. So players are confronted with invisible enemies, or just the legs of an enemy, or must fight in quicksand, or deal with high winds and the like. There are even several dungeons to negotiate, which demand multiple bouts. And the skill with which this has been enacted is all the more commendable given that the singleplayer campaign is essentially still missing from every other beat 'em up.

Lest this all sound a little *too* familiar though, rest assured that several additions and improvements have been introduced. A revised character list and new arena types are the most obvious of these. The mix of characters remains substantively the same with only one or two omissions and additions – though as mentioned above, the characteristic sense of balance is undiminished. The most notable character additions are the platform-specific ones (of which, more later), and Necrid. Designed by Canadian comic/figurine industry veteran, Todd McFarlane, he's not much to look at, but comes to life in combat with a satisfying array of moves. Similarly, some of the new arenas only offer cosmetic enhancements, while others are partially enclosed, requiring old hands to adopt a new ring out strategy.

The most significant new features, though, are the Extra modes, which are essentially a variation of the basic Arcade and Survival modes that allow players to choose different weapons before bouts of combat. New weapons can be acquired over the course of the Weapon Master missions, and each one confers a different set of attributes over their wielder. So, for example, one weapon might increase a character's offensive capabilities, but deplete their health

The soul still burns

Frankly, *Soul Calibur* wouldn't be *Soul Calibur* without the magnificently histrionic voiceover that accompanies the start of every bout, and acclaims every victory (or defeat). Particularly hilarious are the potted (and potty) character histories. Such as, "The Greek reflected in her eyes drives her to battle!" (Sophitia); or, "She rides the wind freely, singing her wind songs!" (Talim). More mundane, but no less entertaining are Cassandra's biog, "She chooses her path like a free bird!" And Mitsurugi's, "His motivation is the thirst for power!" But these are just the tip of the iceberg.





Soul Calibur II isn't quite so far ahead of its peers visually as the original Soul Calibur was when it appeared on Dreamcast. But it is stunningly beautiful, and a significant improvement on its predecessor – and still ahead of its peers









Since special techniques are, in general, so easy to perform, Soul Calibur is both more accessible, and more focused on timing and tactics than its beat 'em up brethren, though with no consequent loss of complexity

Myopic moaning

There's no denying that, visually, *Soul Calibur II* lacks the paradigmatic impact of *Soul Calibur*. When the original came out its appearance was technically and aesthetically so far ahead of any other game, and every other genre, that it still looks beautiful nearly four years on. *Soul Calibur II* isn't quite so far ahead of the competition, so its visual virtuosity isn't as pronounced, prompting some criticism that it isn't a substantial improvement over the original. Nevertheless, this is a beautiful game, and one that's demonstrably more so than its predecessor.

gradually, while another might increase a character's resistance to damage, but inflict damage on them every time they attack. It's yet another facet of *Soul Calibur II*'s brilliance, but it's also an example of its ability to offer complexity without sacrificing accessibility. Indeed no other beat 'em up developer is quite as willing to experiment with the form in a bid to stave off the moribundity that's gradually subsuming the genre.

In truth, there's very little to distinguish each of the three hardware versions of the game (which in turn aren't substantially different from the coin-op version, save by virtue of the Weapon Master mode). Graphically, the PlayStation2 version is noticeably inferior to the other two, which are each on a par, though not enough to affect the amount of enjoyment the title offers. Indeed since the graphical differences are slight, the disparity in quality between the titles comes down to the platform-specific characters and, in the absence of an arcade stick peripheral, the suitability the controller.

Regarding the characters, Spawn, on Xbox, is probably the most satisfying to play (pedants offended by the lack of his characteristic cloak take note; he transforms it into a big axe at the start of the game), though Link fits surprisingly well both aesthetically and in terms of play mechanics (he's also the only one of the three to get his own signature tune). By contrast, PlayStation2's Heihachi is the weakest of the trio, offering nothing to match Spawn's solid combos or Link's long distance attacks (via bow, boomerang and bomb, of course).

In terms of controllers, the large Xbox pad is by far the most unsuited, though the S-pad and PS2's DualShock2 are adequate. Surprisingly, the GameCube controller proves most suitable. Since the game is so reliant on combinations of button presses, rather than button sequences, the placement of the A, X and Y buttons is ideal, and C-stick shortcuts to oft-used combos also work well, as they did on the Dreamcast's triggers. So if **Edge** was pushed to make a choice, it would have to opt for the GameCube version, though any difference in quality is marginal.

"With every other beat 'em up having failed to equal Soul Calibur, it seems churlish to criticise the sequel for merely matching and updating it"









The only significant flaw common to all three versions is not actually the similarity to its predecessor; it's the ease with which the default mode can be beaten. Indeed, though this is undeniably a relatively conservative sequel, since every other beat 'em up franchise has singularly failed to learn anything from *Soul Calibur*'s brilliance, any similarity is no bad thing. With every other beat 'em up having failed to equal, let alone exceed the original, it seems churlish to criticise the sequel for merely matching and updating it. Ultimately, though it might not have the same historic impact, this is a game that's superior to its predecessor in almost every way. Which means that it's also superior to every other 3D beat 'em up.

Edge rating: ? out of ten





Several new arenas are partially walled, which requires a slightly different ring out strategy to the stages of old. But combat technique is more important than interactive settings

Amplitude

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEA** Developer: **Harmonix** Price: **$50 (£32)** Release: **Out now (US), TBC (UK)**



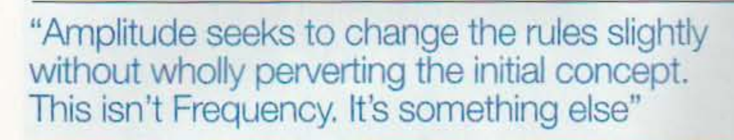


FreQs are now in 3D, and more body parts are unlocked the further you progress through the game. They can still be randomly generated

To understand what *Amplitude* is, you first need to know how it relates to *Frequency*. Harmonix's previous title licensed an array of dance music tracks, and arranged each component – bass, drums, vocals, synth and so on – as a three-note component on the interior wall of a hexagonal tube. The player travelled through the tube, choosing a side to 'play' at the end of each bar, and matching the sequence of notes to one of three buttons on the DualShock pad. Complete two bars in a row on a track and the track would loop for a while, leaving the player free to move onto the next, and the aural experience building.

However, the main reward wasn't aural: it was points. A score in the thousands. A score one better than you scored last time. Nirvana in *Frequency* was the perfect run. From the beginning of the tunnel to the end, each beat matched, each multiplier applied. But it always appeared unattainable.

Why? Because the octagonal construction of the web meant that it was always possible to go left or right, and that made every bar's closing moments a decision. And once you'd decided, you wouldn't necessarily ever know if it was the right decision, because there might have been more points to be had if you'd gone left; or maybe even more two tracks to the right; and a decision taken now might not lead to a weak points run until 15 bars down the line. The combination of your free will and the game's cascading structure was both compelling and intimidating.



"Amplitude seeks to change the rules slightly without wholly perverting the initial concept. This isn't Frequency. It's something else"



Freestyle is handled differently to *Frequency*. It's now a powerup similar to the Autocatcher or Multiplier, and comes in useful when you've just failed a bar or want to restart all the bars to get a higher combo

Frequency's closest aesthetic relative was *Tempest*, in that both games take place on a glow-stick wireframe tunnel, and both games' appeal lies in reaction and the thrill of the zone. But the difference between *Tempest* and *Frequency* is key. While a single web in *Tempest* comprises a number of variables which can produce a game of almost infinite circumstance, a song in *Frequency* is always the same. The only thing that changes is the way you move through it, based on a number of binary decisions – move to the vocals after the drums, or take the bass first – but when you realise that those routes are finite, and that, if only they were more clearly illustrated, not based on chance and memory, the mercurial notion of the perfect score would not be as mercurial as it seems. There's a perfect score in *Frequency*, just as there is in *Amplitude*.

Amplitude is much more honest about this. The superficial change to the game is obvious and, for those who love the zone, initially chilling. The game no longer takes place in a snaking tube, but on top of an arced plain, still twisting through a digital landscape which looks like *Rez* painted by ravers. Once you have reached the far left or the far right of the plain, there is nowhere to go but back on yourself. If you have matched all the bars from left to right faultlessly, the game gives you a moment to rush back over to the other side. If not, you almost certainly won't make it to the first beat of your next bar in time, and your combo will break.

It sounds constrictive, but it's not. It's just straightforward about what the player has to achieve – every broken combo in *Frequency* felt like your fault in that instant, and obscurity hinted that there was some way of saving your streak. There almost certainly wasn't, and *Amplitude* makes this clear. You quickly learn that, no, you messed up the pattern some time ago, and now you're stuck in a sequence that simply doesn't work with this game, and unless you calm down and plan ahead, you're going to be in a low-scoring loop for the rest of the song. To hammer the point home, multipliers can now go as high as 8x, or 16x with powerups. Miss a single beat and it's back to single-figure scores.

Reinforcing the idea of clinically defined routes through the songs, the game now indicates the approaching 'live' tracks with a vivid green multiplier. Far from hand-holding you through combos, it makes the game more of a 'zone' experience, as your brain learns to interpret the splash of green as instinctive direction signifiers. There is no longer any sensation of being lost in the web, nor does the act of scoring phenomenally high numbers necessitate learning the perfect route. The game is less of a memory test, and more one of pressure and reaction just like always, except for... more.





The energy bar on the right is a good indicator of your success, and changes colour as you get closer to failure







Amplitude demands so much concentration that taking screenshots can seriously damage your rhythm, and hence your scores. Rest assured **Edge**'s numbers are somewhat bigger than the paltry figures demonstrated by these screens



Because at *Amplitude*'s core is *Frequency*, magnified: darting pupils in wide eyes watch the same beats hit the line, and fingers interpret the visuals with no pause for thought. Nirvana attained, you've built the music into a full song, which loops and arcs with the translucent visuals, and you're elated and scared at the same time, because this is a rush, but as soon as your thoughts catch your fingers you're going to start wondering how the hell you're doing this.

Catch your breath, question it, miss a beat and everything breaks down. The emotions come back, and the fear that Harmonix has broken God's own musical instrument just fades into nothing, because it turns out *Amplitude* is actually the perfect sequel. Not an expansion pack; a game that doesn't set out to mimic its forefather, but seeks to change the rules slightly without wholly perverting the initial concept. This isn't *Frequency*. It's something else.

Edge rating: ? out of ten



Get a bar full of special notes, like the green squares (left) and you can unleash a powerup with the x button. For example, the slo-mo feature slows everything down

Music: response

No mention of the music in a game based entirely on music? Sure. There has been some consternation among *Frequency* devotees ever since the soundtrack for the game's sequel was announced, but that the soundtrack has a guitar skew – Slipknot, Weezer and Blink 182 all appear – matters little. The music's just the base metal, there for you to mould into something else. And some of it you'll love, some of it you'll loathe, and by your second week in *Amplitude*'s world you'll know it all off by heart. **Edge** can't stop singing Freezepop. Plus ça change…

Silent Hill 3

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Konami** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£40** Release: **May 23**







Heather constantly questions the presence of save points – and the self-knowing references continue with a fairground 'haunted' house



***S**ilent Hill* sits in a bizarre niche. High profile and beautifully (read expensively) produced, the game's content is, however, almost cultishly esoteric. In many ways this third iteration is the most accessible and well balanced so far, yet in others it's the most closed off, the most uncompromising.

"Allow the mood to feel its way into you and the sticky combat and occasional confusion become part of the experience"

Once again the experience is greater than the sum of its parts, which is fortunate as the parts have barely changed. The unconvinced have long derided the simplistic, sluggish combat, but *Silent Hill 3*'s new lead character Heather certainly has a far wider range of weapons than either of her predecessors (see No, don't get up). The pace of the whole game is higher too, with eventless wandering reserved only for the lost. And you should get lost less often than before, as the levels, though still large, are notably less sprawling. Moments of clueless meandering can still occur if you're anything less than thorough in your searching, though.

Meanwhile the puzzles are tough but logical. And some, such as one involving a morgue, bloody numbers and a crematorium door, can be very satisfying. In most cases they're a welcome change of objective rather than an annoying barrier and, as ever, hooray for riddles beyond 'where is the door for this key?' As before, there are three levels of puzzle difficulty independent of combat toughness, and they do make a difference.

Also strong are the characters, with perhaps the most impressive visual and textual representations seen yet, loaded with tiny but important details. But the story that encompasses them doesn't fare so well, becoming increasingly hard to follow towards its climax. Worse still, is that significant revelations rely on a detailed knowledge of the preceding games, robbing the finale of drama for newcomers. The tale also loses out in that it only works on one, literal level; *Silent Hill 2*'s journey could be read metaphorically as a post-mortem descent into hell, and was more intriguing for it.

The new locations are effective, particularly the mall and subway of the opening third, as evil is all the more grotesque in such familiar surroundings. But again the most remarkable moments are the most ambiguous: the still-spinning wheel of a blood riddled wheelchair, the bloated creature lying silently on its face. It's not the explicit content people should worry about here, but the implicit. That much of it is not

Previously in E112, E117, E121





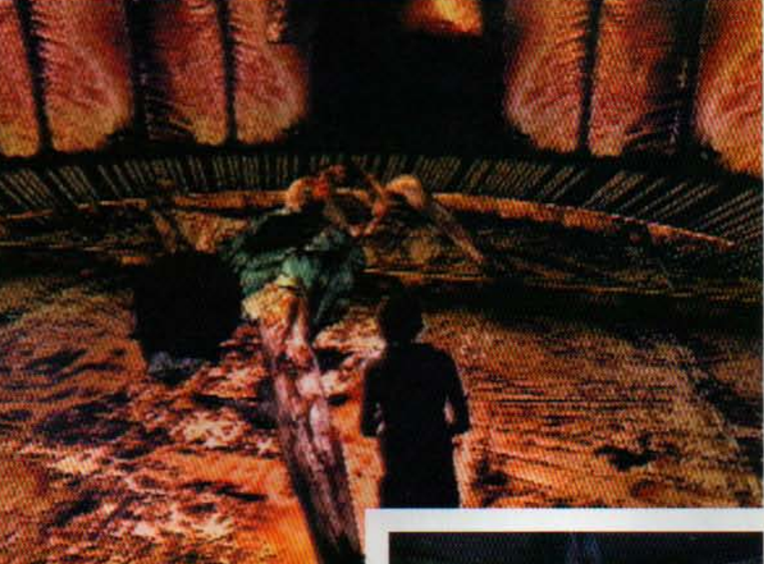
As in the previous game, light and shadow are used to great effect. Seen outside in daylight, these insectile, bladed creatures have far less impact. The associated noises are finely judged to set your teeth on edge wherever you are



even in Silent Hill helps, as once you return to the town things get rather familiar. The hospital figures heavily again, though revised nurse enemies, new areas and a spectacular focus-blurring effect during an impressively hellish period help stoke interest. Look out, too, for a schoolroom from the original.

What *Silent Hill 3* does superbly is create atmosphere – some creatures and locations are breathtaking, genuinely disturbing on a psychological level. Allow the mood to feel its way into you and the sticky combat and occasional something's-missing-don't-know-what confusion become part of the experience. Expect high action or a gameplay revolution and you'll be disappointed. *Silent Hill 3* is an excellent addition for devotees but, despite a few vivacious tweaks, does little to convince anyone else.

Edge rating: ? out of ten







The diseased, flesh-like environs continue to disturb in a slow-burning way – but occasional moments can shock due to sheer unexpectedness



No, don't get up

Ammunition is still perilously scarce – there's an option to double it – but at least you've got some decent guns. The shotgun stops most things, the machine-gun's deadly but chews clips and the flamethrower (unlocked on completion) does exactly what it says on the bodybag. Wasting these on anything less than a boss is asking for trouble, though, and there are several new mêlée weapons, including a maul (too heavy for most fights), a stun gun (pretty and effective) and a short katana. Make this last one your default weapon. Or better still, run away like the girl you are.

P.N.03

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£35)** Release: **Out now (Japan), Q3 (UK)**

Previously in **E119**









Destroy an enemy and the combo meter begins to tick down. This puts the pressure on to defeat the room's guardians in double-quick time









Dodging deadly homing missiles is incredibly satisfying, mostly because you have to wait until the very last moment to make a move. This gives you time to reduce the target's shield and, of course, looks cooler

Murder she rote

There's no question that a good memory is beneficial to beating *P.N.03*. Enemies generally fire a destructive salvo and then hold back to re-energise. Timing is crucial, and getting as many shots off as possible while the enemy is 'sleeping' is pivotal to success. It's essentially a game of dare, where the stakes are your continues.

This game hurts. *P.N.03* requires lightning-fast reflexes, a good memory and determination. And for those who make the time to beat it on the hardest difficulty setting, it will make the tendons in your arm ache. True, enemies can be killed by upgrading the heroine's Palm Shot to fire automatic energy bolts, but it's no match for jabbing the fire button hundreds of times a minute. Know this and you know what kind of game *P.N.03* is. Those not weaned on the likes of *Nemesis* and *1942* can look away now.

In fact, *P.N.03*'s core mechanics bear more resemblance to an even more venerable coin-op: *Space Invaders*. Strip away its *Virtual Light*-inspired setting and aesthetic and you're playing something really very humble. Rooms are entered and waves of assailants appear. Their attacks are predictable, their weaknesses even more so. To survive you must either dodge or shield yourself behind objects. You'll soon learn the groove: shoot, dodge, shoot, dodge. It should get tedious, but it doesn't. Like its distant relative, *P.N.03* rewards skill above all else and mastery brings huge satisfaction.

But there such comparisons must stop, because Capcom's latest game has an elegance of its own that should be commended. Heroine, Vanessa Schneider is one of the most sassy characters to emerge in some time. She speaks little dialogue, is encased in armour and exudes little overt 'personality', but, hey, she can dance. Most of the game's charm arises from Schneider's ability to pirouette her way out of seemingly impossible situations. Sidesteps and cartwheels are performed with the shoulder buttons, front and back somersaults with the B button. It's a simple system and one that can make even the novice player look adept.

But there is some added depth, if not from a completely unexpected source. As in all of Capcom's recent action games, points make prizes. Combo multiple enemies in a room and you'll earn credits, escape without taking a hit and you receive a further bonus. These can then be traded in for upgrades at shops (large pink baubles) or at the end of a level. These powerups include Aegis Suit upgrades and Energy Drive charges – special attacks that, if triggered in the heat of battle, can take down several enemies at a time.

P.N.03 may be rather short and its premise simple, but grace under fire has rarely been done better.

Edge rating: ? out of ten

Eve Online: The Second Genesis

Format: PC Publisher: Simon & Schuster Interactive Developer: Crowd Control Productions Price: $50 (£32) plus $12 (£8) per month billing Release: Out now Previously in E106, E118

From the outset, *Eve Online*'s appeal is hard to fathom. Granted, the character-generation process and contemporary sci-fi styling contribute to an ambience of quality and depth. But as the game proper begins, and you find yourself presented with a point-and-click system of flight control and an interface bristling with icons and windows, you can feel a little lost. **Edge** foresees a few post-installation brow-wrinkles, especially from those looking for that mythical *Elite* clone. Or any measure of dogfighting, as *Eve* offers no direct ship-piloting. But, like many online RPGs, time and perseverance are the keys to fulfilment. As expectations are put aside and the game is explored for its own merits, it begins to provide a vast sense of potential that few games muster.

Like many of its massively-multiplayer peers, *Eve* features a complex economic supply-and-demand model, driven by player trade. Most will find better prices for their wares – mined minerals, ships, homemade gadgets, exotic goods, etc – when sold to other players rather than NPCs. This trade system is the very foundation of player-run corporations. And the only way to find like-minded businessmen with which to band is through communication, courtesy of the in-game chat and email functions.

In this department, *Eve* is little different from the majority of MMRPGs; chatting with other players for fun and profit is a key part of the game. It's also the best way to discover the *Eve* universe, and at this late stage in beta testing, the game boasts a large and helpful community. But the potential for that community to evolve is where *Eve* stands apart from its peers. This isn't a game where high-level players do exactly what low-level players do, only with more fireworks. The path a character takes is determined by his skill-sets and this can be expanded in any direction. You might begin life as a warrior; but spend time in accountancy schooling, and you'll become sought-after for your cash-handling skills. Alternatively, a career as a bounty hunter may appeal. The paths one can take are many and varied; the impact this will have on a community that the developer hopes will reach the 100,000 mark is exciting and impossible to predict.

Eve is a game of high ideals and lofty ambition. Only time will tell whether it reaches the heights it's aiming for, but from here, its plumage seems bright.

Edge rating: ? out of ten















In truth combat is not *Eve Online*'s strongest card and can feel a little dispassionate. But as it's an MMRPG the world is constantly evolving and the Icelandic developer is promising improvements to the formula





Freak or unique?

Most RPGs put you through a character-generation process, but none quite so detailed as that in *Eve Online*. While boosting base-stats with extra points and selecting skill-sets may be familiar to most, few games offer such variety when it comes to physical appearance. When you start a character in *Eve Online*, it's a safe bet that you'll look unique.

Breath of Fire: Dragon Quarter

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **In-house** Price: **$50 (£31)** Release: **Out now (US), July (UK)**

Previously in **E**116







The glorious soundtrack features two of composing's brightest lights, Hitoshi Sakamoto and Yasunori Mitsuda, whose work includes *Final Fantasy Tactics* and *Radiant Silvergun*







Out ranking

As a ranger in the gameworld your character is given a status ranking known as the D-rank which increases in proportion to the player's progression through the game. As you fulfil special goals (such as beating the game in an allotted amount of time) your D-rank will rise. With an increased D-rank the player soon finds the NPCs change and new areas of the game are opened up. Sub-quests are added and the world is enriched with each subsequent play. While the repetitiveness will grate with some players, completists should be in their element.



Dragon Quarter is certainly trying something new and interesting but as to whether the gaming public will buy into it is anyone's guess. The trend towards shorter games that can be completed several times will surely help Capcom's case

While the majority of videogame RPG franchises seem content to tweak each update, Capcom has always steered the *Breath of Fire* series in different directions from game to game. This latest, the fifth in the series, hearkens back to the genre's earliest dungeon exploring days and Capcom has invented its own sub-genre title for the resulting mix of gameplay: the arcade RPG.

The developer neatly sidesteps clichéd FMV introductions and the player is launched straight into gameplay. The juxtaposition of luscious cel visuals and proto-RPG game pacing is curious and feels at once fresh but familiar. Plot is clearly secondary to action and, in terms of the story's execution, this could be Squaresoft pre-1994. You take the role of a ranger, protecting a subterranean city from monsters, who carries out a mission predictably not what it at first seems.

Thankfully *Dragon Quarter* employs more complicated battle mechanics. An ability point (AP) system dictates your every move as the fights play out on the 3D field screen a la *Vagrant Story*. Walking around the battlefield, attacking and using magic costs a certain amount of AP and using it wisely to position your character intelligently is just as important as whacking out your biggest spell.

Three types of attacks can be assigned and you can earn and customise new skills to attach to weapons, armour and shields, and use combinations of attacks to fight. Deep customisation looks to be the future for RPGs and here responsibility for character development is placed firmly on the player's shoulders. Enemies are seen on the field screen so there are no random battles and the odds can be turned towards the player before the fight starts with a well-placed trap.

Recently, RPGs have become more magnanimous, with easy enemies and a wealth of items, but *BoF* is different. After 20 minutes or so you will run out of health items and meet with inevitable death. You then restart the adventure with your new stats and weapons. In each subsequent play through, new cut-scenes are added to flesh out the plot. The game will take the skilled less than ten hours to complete but there is much replay value (see Out ranking).

Such bastard generic cross-pollination will be of keen interest to those who have pigeonholed the console RPG as yesterday's bread, as *Dragon Quarter* variously succeeds in its misfit marriage.

Edge rating: ? out of ten

Dodonpachi: Dai-Ou-Jou

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Arika** Developer: **Cave** Price: **¥6,800 (£35)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)**

While *Ikaruga* plays like a carefully plotted gaming haiku, *Dai-Ou-Jou* is as traditional an update for the genre as fans could hope for. For the Saturn shooter obsessive the significance of Cave's return to console porting cannot be underestimated. Famed for deep orthodox shoot 'em ups that place as much emphasis on players improving scores as unlocking art, Cave has once again shown why, for a genre as old as videogaming time, it is the last bastion.

Dai-Ou-Jou is the fourth episode in the *Dodonpachi* universe, and for the many fans of the series this latest iteration is a return to form, picking up where the benchmark second game left off. Genre novices should approach with caution as the game is both demanding and deep. Initially choosing between two craft the player must then pick an elemental doll (pilot) that will place gun efficiency emphasis on one of the two weapons (spread and laser).

Gameplay evolution can conceivably be split into two sections: first, the player must focus on getting through the game without losing lives. By drawing fire from the frightening numbers of enemies that fill the screen, the player creates their own unique maze of bullets to work through. Mastering getting through the game in a single credit (the only way to get on the high score table) will not come easily and most westerners will put the title down at this point.

Second, for the expert player the *Dodonpachi* series has always been about combos and high scores. By linking together the destruction of enemies with no more than one second's intermission between each hit, a combo meter can be raised. The DVD Arika has included (at least with this first pressing) does more than simply demonstrate there will always be people better at videogames than you, it contains films of the best Japanese players not only completing the game in a single life but also managing to combo each stage without dropping the sequence.

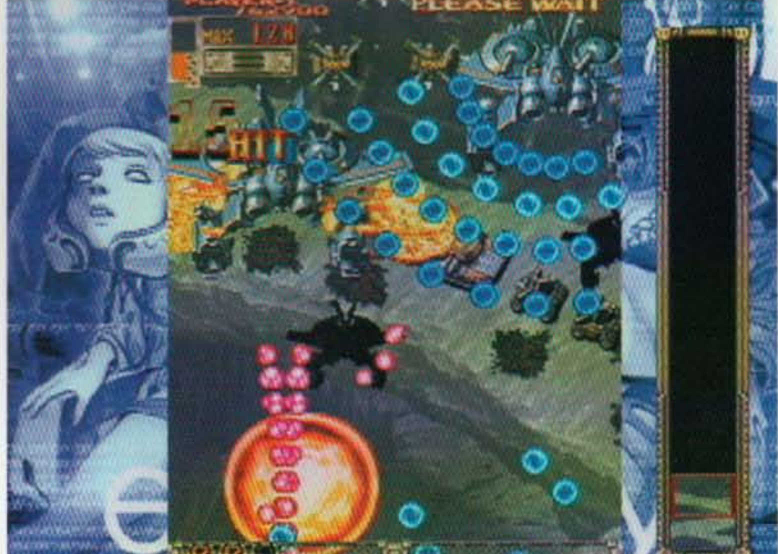
This is not a videogame that everyone can, nor will necessarily want to, succeed in. But in a videogame publishing world wanting all titles to be all things to all men this is so deeply refreshing. Get good at *Dai-Ou-Jou*, compare your scores with like-minded friends, step up a few places on the world leaderboard each time you play and enjoy the excitement of arcade competition gaming at its finest.

Edge rating: 7 out of ten









While **Edge** usually refrains from tortured and hackneyed similes, the phrase, 'like a hot knife through butter' describes perfectly the sublime feeling of mowing down enemies in the *Dodonpachi* series

The elation at achieving a huge combo or managing to squeeze through a level without losing a life is something rarely found in games today. Twitch gaming will not die easily



Death by speed

This arcade-perfect PS2 port comes stuffed with extras such as a Simulation mode, which allows the player to set a variety of gameplay conditions, and a gallery featuring Junya Inoue's illustrations for the game. The frightening Death mode sees the player fight each successive boss. The difference here is that the boss bullet speed is increased two-fold rendering the mode impossible to all but those with superhuman reaction times.

MotoGP: Ultimate Racing Technology 2

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **THQ** Developer: **Climax Studios (Brighton)** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

Previously in **E**123









MotoGP2's crash cam is splendid. The shaking, ground-level view of the grinding bike and ragdoll rider is genuinely wince-making











Measures have been taken to improve online play. Victims of the cretins that race round the track backwards will be particularly happy to see this screen (left). There's now an option to design your own logo, which then adorns both sides of your bike. Online show-offs will be in their element (right)

Bit of a turnaround

One of the criticisms *MotoGP* fans had of the first game was the omission of several tracks from the real-life circuit. In response, six new tracks complement the original 11: Phakisa (South Africa), Catalunya (Spain), Estoril (Portugal), Rio (Brazil), Motegi (Japan) and Sepang (Malaysia) fill the roster out significantly. Besides making for a longer Career mode, they should provide more variety when it comes to online play.

With its flawless handling and spirited AI riders, *MotoGP: URT* provided perhaps the best racing experience of 2002; a reputation that was only enhanced with the game's appearance on Xbox Live just a few months ago. So it doesn't seem like fans have had to wait long for this follow-up.

As such, *MotoGP2* doesn't benefit from the same 'shock of the new' that the first game enjoyed. But it's testament to the game's quality that this familiarity only breeds infatuation, once again: it effortlessly outshines its predecessor in every respect.

The visuals show a greater command of the Xbox hardware than perhaps any other racer **Edge** has seen, with more intricate texturing and polys working together to create far more realistic bikes than those found in the original. But it's not just the added detail that makes *MotoGP2* so attractive. The use of Fresnel lighting, a technique that varies the reflection of light according to the angle of view, means that motorbikes now sit within their environments more convincingly than ever.

Further hard work in the Climax garage has bolstered the gameplay, both online and off. As an introduction to *MotoGP* racing, the original's Career mode was fine; lately though it has become a routine rite of passage for successful online play. That's no longer the case. Maxing out a bike's stats is now both more daunting and enjoyable, thanks to an intelligent rejig of the singleplayer structure. Besides the training, each race now comes with a set of mini-challenges that award extra points and teach players the ideal racing line.

Cleverly, some early challenges are nigh-on impossible, encouraging replay once a bike of sufficient pedigree has been developed. This all represents a satisfying expansion of the Career mode, which now offers far more depth to offline racers.

The online aspect has been similarly bolstered, as a variety of obstacles prevent the kind of practice that tarnished the online demo. Walls prevent outrageous physical shortcuts; excessive time spent off the track nullifies a laptime; 'backwards riders' become harmless ghosts; and idiots can be permanently banned from a game.

It may not re-invent the wheel, but *MotoGP2* is a shiny new alloy among racing games, and builds upon the series' excellent reputation. And that should be enough to stir up Xbox Live all over again.

Edge rating: ? out of te

Clock Tower 3

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **Sunsoft** Price: **$50 (£31)** Release: **Out now (US), June 20 (UK)** Previously in **E**116

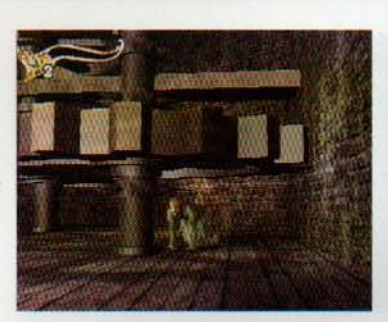
Shock, drama, even the occasional shiver of revulsion: the survival horror canon provides all these, but manipulating emotions is a tricky business. *Clock Tower 3*, aptly, will wind you up, but in failing to incite tension, Capcom's latest venture into the realm of bogeymen majors on frustration and irritation.

The game's one original element is the lack of enemies. Instead of a variety of creatures, for each section the player suffers the constant attentions of one individual. These stalkers cannot be killed until a designated boss battle, forcing the player to hide. A lot. Small green whirls appear on suitable locations (such as a toilet door, a curtain or a niche behind a fish tank) to hammer home their usefulness, so it's a simple case of heading for one of these. Blue whirls indicate the trigger for a one-time only cinematic in which the stalker is 'killed', but despite, say, having their head cooked, they return without delay once you leave the room. Which rather makes them a waste of time.

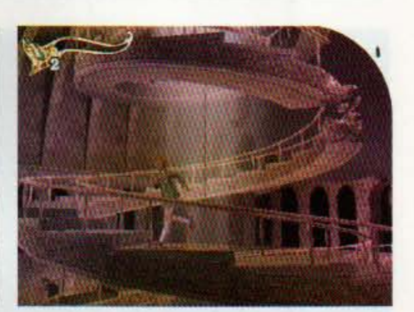
Add increasingly laughable enemies with just a handful of utterances and their constant attentions become all the more wearisome, especially as your character, Alyssa, can be taken from healthy to dead without the player ever regaining control. Enemies also appear from any direction, even dead ends from which you've just emerged, further testing your suspension of disbelief. But if the stalkers weren't so annoying you'd have more time to notice the clichéd, dreary mechanics underneath. Items need finding (easy when they all sparkle) and taking to distant places. Lazy design even within these familiar boundaries means that some events simply won't work at the 'wrong' time – try smothering a fire with ash before investigating a nearby room, for instance, and Alyssa just can't do it. 'Dramatic' camera angles can also make the simplest actions difficult, let alone efficient evasion.

Boss battles are no better. Success is a case of running in circles until an enemy declaration indicates a pause – "damn!" perhaps, or "catch!" This gives Alyssa time to charge an arrow (the bow only appears in these battles) so that a chain of energy traps the enemy. Then either repeatedly fire or, if they break free, repeat the trick. And it goes on, creaking to a final battle that's climactic only in that it's repetitive and drawn out. *Clock Tower 3* is never scary: rather it's unwitting proof of the banality of evil.

Edge rating: ? out of ten













The only opposition other than stalkers are rather lame ghosts. Exorcise them by returning items (here spectacles, extreme foreground) to their corpses (behind). Yes, it really is that simple



While well presented, the story itself is predictable and markedly un-scary. The cut-scenes simply emphasise just how staid the events of the game proper are – including the final boss battle

Wait, there's (a little) more

Completing the game unlocks a gallery of character art and a cut-scene theatre, which is actually better than it sounds. 'Battle Royale' director Kinji Fukasaku oversaw the event films, and his directorial expertise shows despite the sometimes hysterically melodramatic actions of the characters. Sadly, their chief function is to show how far the Alyssa of the tale – lithe, cheeky and resourceful – remains from the plodding, helpless cipher of the game.

Vietcong

Format: PC Publisher: Take 2 Developer: Pterodon Price: £35 Release: Out now

Previously in E115









There are some splendid touches in the game – such as the fact that you lift a gun when you get close to an object, rather than losing perspective







Combat is fast and furious, with you finding yourself belly-down on the deck most of the time. It's pretty easy to die, so you'll need to make full use of the copious amounts of cover that the jungle provides

Hardly heroes

This doesn't do the US military any favours, with a nasty bunch of cuss-filled GIs making up the majority of your squad. These chaps are essential to getting through the levels, but their use often feels artificial, and they lack the animation and realism of characters in many other contemporary FPS games, each one greeting you with a strange stare. Another disconcerting point is that they are all immortal. Not once do you lose a man, despite the endless carnage you are put through. It's not the greatest plot.

The war in the Vietnamese jungle has proved to be an unpopular topic for game developers. It's so much easier to produce another WWII game, or something based in a world with no political implications. So you have to give credit to Pterodon for making a valiant attempt to recreate the ill-fated Vietnamese conflict. *Vietcong* is not a game without ambition.

The missions are reasonably varied, including some vehicles, some sniping and a fair bit of crawling about in the undergrowth. But the core of the game is deep jungle patrolling with a team of specialists. You, the special forces lieutenant, depend on your point man, the AI-controlled squad scout, to lead the way. If you're going to spot the majority of the traps that will cross your path then you have to work with your team-mates.

Combat is realistic and intimidating. Enemies rush through the jungle ahead of you, making the first encounter with the Vietcong themselves an interesting experience – run forward too fast and you'll wind up dead on a spike trap. *Vietcong* forces you to use cover and to place your shots carefully and, for the most part, can be commended for this approach. It certainly feels different to numerous other firstperson shooters on the PC.

The game's campaign is also broken up by return trips to your bunker between missions (a little bit like *Unreal 2*'s efforts to make things more interesting with the non-combat ship sections) and some instant action sections – by far the best part of the game – where you slowly open up different zones for instant gratification fire-fights.

But this is where the praise ends. Repetitive and crude, this is a game that is often let down by the rough edges of a development team that didn't seem to have the time or the money to realise its ambitions. The game is flawed in many places, and some stages amount to tedious frustration – largely thanks to simplistic and under-evolved level design.

That almost every level feels like a decorated corridor doesn't add much to the atmosphere, either. What grates worst of all though, are the endless obscenities and anti-VC bile spewed forth from your hate-filled squad, something that even inveterate swearers will find a little hard to bear. There might be a great Vietnam game out there, but this just isn't it.

Edge rating: 7 out of ten

Made in Wario

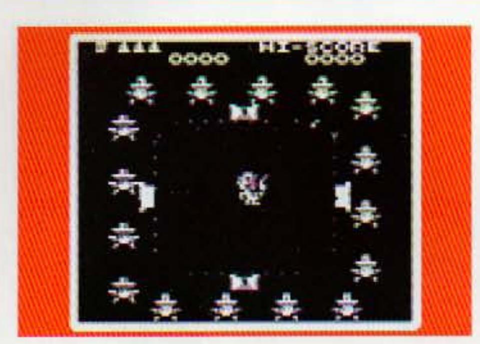
Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥4,800 (£25)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)**

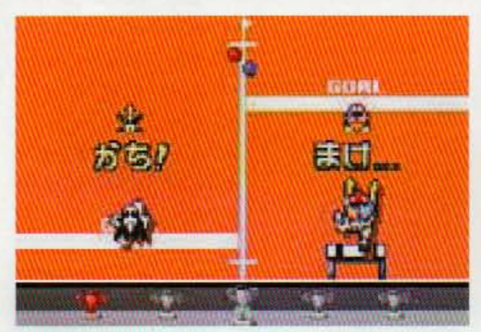
Wit is not something you often find in videogames. In fact, forget the early LucasArts point 'n' click adventures for a moment and you'll struggle to think of a single game that actually made you laugh out loud. *Made in Wario* is the wittiest and most amusing game **Edge** has played in a long, long time.

Pitched somewhere between *Bishi Bashi Special* and *Blipverts*, *Made in Wario* offers some 200-plus 'micro' games to test your split-second reactions. Each game lasts about five seconds, is grouped with around 15 other games and is capped-off with a short boss encounter. Defying one-word labels, **Edge**'s favourite games include the one where you have to make a dog happy by touching its paws and the one where you have to prevent a bogie escaping from a girl's nose.

However, *Made in Wario* is not just about juvenile humour, it displays a refreshing intertextuality that manages to both poke fun at and celebrate videogames. You'll find clever facsimiles of Virtua Boy, NES, Game Boy and mobile phone games. You'll also find that *Made in Wario* confidently sticks two fingers up at an industry that seems to have lost its sense of humour.

Edge rating: ? out of ten









Be warned: *Made in Wario* will take even the most clutsy gamer about three hours to complete. There are some ludicrous link-up games to unlock, however, which increase the fun and longevity

Golden Sun: The Lost Age

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **Camelot** Price: **$30 (£19)** Release: **Out now (US), TBC (UK)**



Along with Djinn powers the Adepts in your party will be able to use Psynergy to overcome obstacles and puzzles in the game. Whirlwind, for instance will shift bushes to reveal hidden entrances to caves and temples







Like some Saturday matinee series you can probably expect *Golden Sun* to run and run. At the climax of the last instalment, and with only part of the quest complete, our heroes were cast adrift on a floating island. As you'd expect *The Lost Age* plunges you straight into the thick of the plot, where the last game left off. Although newbies will still be able to follow what's happening, they naturally won't feel as much affinity for the characters, at least initially.

As RPGs go this is as traditional as they come. Random battles, an overworld map to roam around, maze-like dungeons and party management are order of the day. Woefully, it's even possible to ransack the houses of NPCs while they look on dispassionately. But while some of the novelty of seeing a stalwart RPG on Game Boy Advance has worn off, *The Lost Age* is still slick, practised and enjoyable.

However, the only element that really stands out is the collection and utilisation of magical Djinns. These creatures can be assigned to party members and used to devastating effect in battles. Each also has a particular skill to help with solving puzzles. Fans will lap it up, others may find it a little stodgy.

Edge rating: ? out of ten

World War II: Frontline Command

Format: PC Publisher: Koch Media Developer: The Bitmap Brothers Price: £30 Release: Out now

Previously in E122



The engine is based on the technologies that brought us *Z2*, but with a totally different game dynamic laid over the top. *Frontline Command* is a game of well rounded goal-based strategy and tactics







The next game to roll out of the Bitmap Brothers stable is this rather by-the-numbers realtime strategy, set in post-D-Day wartime Europe. Not that this is a bad thing, at least for the armies of PC-based armchair generals who seem to keep the PC games industry afloat simply by virtue of investment in strategy.

Frontline Command is well engineered and, while unexceptional in all almost every fashion, it does boast a superb level of attention to detail. Terrain is important, with troopers being able to hide behind low walls as they crawl, or capture buildings to use as cover as they battle their way through the towns of northern Europe. Morale is a factor too, as is line of sight and the pose of the soldiers. Even stealth is taken into account, with noises being heard by the enemy AI soldiers. The levels are well judged and challenge the player to manage troops cleverly, a single unit in the wrong place, and it'll throw a mission in jeopardy.

Despite the polish, there's not much here that a seasoned PC strategy veteran won't have seen before. And for those people who have fond memories of the Bitmap Brothers' 16bit dynamism, *Frontline Command* will seem an acutely quotidian outing.

Edge rating: ? out of ten

Dynasty Warriors 4

Format: PlayStation2 Publisher: Koei Developer: In-house Price: $50 (£32) Release: Out now (US), June 27 (UK)

Previously in E104, E121

The latest iteration of the perennial Japanese blockbusting brawler does little to tamper with the ground rules laid down by previous instalments. The emphasis is still on multiple enemies and massive combos while maintaining a broad strategic focus on battlefield events. And, apart from some very cosmetic graphical tweaking, the game engine is largely intact.

There are several features that have been introduced since *Dynasty Warriors 3* though. The Character Edit mode, for example, allows players to create their own warriors and bodyguards, or the newly introduced ability to challenge opposing generals to a duel (interrupting the mêlée action for an all-or-nothing, one-on-one beat 'em up section). Other changes include the ability to perform a charge attack while jumping and the addition of more effective bodyguards.

There's no denying, though, that this is largely the same game as *DW3*. Those who weren't enchanted by that game will find little to enthuse them in this. But for those who continue to be enthralled by Koei's oeuvre, this is another exhaustive update. Yes it *is* almost the same, but when it's brilliant fun, and no other publisher is releasing games like this, who cares?

Edge rating: ? out of ten









The *Dynasty Warriors* series is unlikely to ever receive much of a revolution in design. But another evolution is hardly a problem when nobody else is making games that are as viscerally entertaining and yet tactically demanding as the latest iteration, which remains just as much fun to play as each of its predecessors. There are certainly plenty of new features to keep die-hard fans happy

Warrior Kings: Battles

Format: PC Publisher: **Empire Interactive** Developer: **Black Cactus** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E116**

More of a re-imagining than a true sequel, *Warrior Kings: Battles* aims to correct the flaws of its questionably paced predecessor by ditching the entire turn-based portion of the design. Working across the varying terrain of a proto-European continent, players now get stuck right into one conflict after another. However, Black Cactus could have pruned further. Individual stages can take an age, with the need to build entire *Settlers*-style social and economic systems before sending newly minted armies into battles, which are invariably a fair distance from the home settlement.

The combat is at least highly charged. What the recycled 3D engine lacks in detail, it makes up for with an ability to scale smoothly from tactical remoteness to ground-level mayhem, while the interplay between the vast range of units adds much to skirmishes. But even with the ability to pause, take stock, then issue orders, it's a chore managing unit movements, particularly while also attending to resource-based matters back at base.

Warrior Kings: Battles mixes and matches familiar mechanisms in interesting ways, but it proves that balancing real wargaming with resource-based empire building is as precarious a task as ever.

Edge rating: ? out of ten









Although never wholly satisfying, *Warrior Kings: Battles* excels in its depiction of empire building and battles, the quality and volume of animation countering the relatively low detail 3D model work

Medieval: Total War – Viking Invasion

Format: PC Publisher: **Activision** Developer: **Creative Assembly** Price: **£20** Release: **Out now**





Viking Invasion's England campaigns offer very different challenges from the original game (above). The pre-battle screens have been totally renovated, and are considerably more effective (right)





While undoubtedly *The Sims'* continued success has been, in part, due to its endless stream of add-ons, other developers are abandoning the concept and expanding them into mini-sequels (see *Warrior Kings: Battles* above). The reasons are clear – the more successful the game, the bigger the potential audience and the more sense to make a pack. If it didn't sell big numbers, a second chance of a release is worth taking.

But where does it leave a game like *Medieval*? One of the most imposing games of the last two years, it was hardly in need of expansion. Smartly, Creative Assembly has realised this and rather than stretching further, it's concentrated. While a helping of additions are for the main game, the heart of the expansion is a smaller campaign setting around the time of the eponymous Viking invasion. Short, tight and intense, it's a considerably different experience from *Medieval* proper and well worth experiencing.

An efficient and well thought out expansion, it's only hampered by the news and first images of its sequel, *Rome: Total War*. Still, it acts as a reminder that despite the graphical excesses in the series' future, its strategic core is one of the most solid in gaming.

Edge rating: ? out of ten

Tao Feng: Fist of the Lotus

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Microsoft** Developer: **Studio Gigante** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**









Clothes tatter and faces splatter as the match progresses. It's the best of five rounds, as players have three energy bars each to whittle down. In between each round, a mini cut-scene ensues, where the floored character stumbles woozily to their feet to continue the match

At first, it seems that the western beat 'em up is born again, free from the sludgy mosh pit of noise and schlock that makes up the *Mortal Kombat* series. *Tao Feng* has some commendable assets: impressive looks and movements, a limb-damage system in which bones can be broken mid-match, and manoeuvres that make full use of the furniture dotted around the pretty combat arenas. A *Tekken*-style button layout has been sensibly used, too, mapping a fist/foot to each one of the four face buttons. But, ultimately, these are just good intentions, thanks to the jarring pace of play.

Beat 'em ups need to rely on twitch craft and sharp reaction speeds to provide their thrills, but *Tao Feng* features a different kind of stuttering altogether. There's no fluidity or smoothness to combos and combat, so matches are garbled and verge even closer to feeling arbitrary than fighting games usually threaten to do.

For all its fresh ideas, the fundament is still crooked, and *Tao Feng* comes off more than a little shaky in the fighting stakes. There's some limited entertainment, but it just collapses when juxtaposed with its relations in Japan. It's a step in the right direction, but one that leaves the player in an unsatisfying place.

Edge rating: ? out of ten

The Testscreen Scores

Here they are then. Below you'll also find the authors of the Points of Review tests (see p76)

01 Zy Nicholson	6/10
02 Ste Curran	5/10
03 Owain Bennallack	7/10
04 Kieron Gillen	4/10
05 Margaret Robertson	6/10
06 Simon Byron	5/10

Soul Calibur II







Edge rating: Nine out of ten

Amplitude

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

Silent Hill 3



Edge rating: Seven out of ten

P.N.03





Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Eve Online: The Second Genesis

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

Breath of Fire: Dragon Quarter



Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Dodonpachi: Dai-Ou-Jou



Edge rating: Eight out of ten

MotoGP: URT2



Edge rating: Eight out of ten

Clock Tower 3



Edge rating: Three out of ten

Vietcong



Edge rating: Five out of ten

Golden Sun: The Lost Age



Edge rating: Six out of ten

Made in Wario



Edge rating: Seven out of ten

World War II: Frontline Command



Edge rating: Five out of ten

Dynasty Warriors 4

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Warrior Kings: Battles





Edge rating: Five out of ten

Medieval: Total War – Viking Invasion

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Tao Feng: Fist of the Lotus



Edge rating: Five out of ten

Way of the Exploding Fist

Edge takes a fresh look at a seminal game classic from yesteryear

Format: **C64 (version tested), Spectrum** Publisher: **Melbourne House** Developer: **Beam Software** Release: **1985**





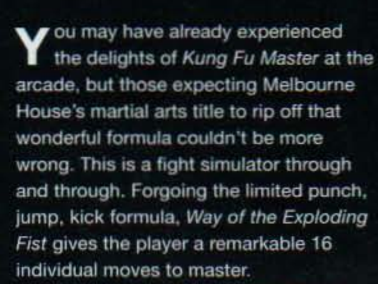


e beautiful backdrops give the game distinctive eastern flavour and the eaming sound effects are startling



Good investment

Although *Karate Champ* came first, *Way of the Exploding Fist*'s influence on the beat 'em up genre is massive. It proved that players could get their heads around more than a jump and kick command and were willing to invest the time to master a game that, on the surface, appeared static. *Exploding Fist* is still marginally enjoyable today, but incredibly slow. Inevitably, beat 'em ups have become more sophisticated with move sets numbering in the thousands. Others may argue that the old scissors/paper/stone form of fighting, encapsulated best by *Street Fighter II*, still reigns supreme.



You may have already experienced the delights of *Kung Fu Master* at the arcade, but those expecting Melbourne House's martial arts title to rip off that wonderful formula couldn't be more wrong. This is a fight simulator through and through. Forgoing the limited punch, jump, kick formula, *Way of the Exploding Fist* gives the player a remarkable 16 individual moves to master.

The concentration on one-on-one fighting has ensured that each move has its own advantages dependent upon the combat situation. Those expecting flashy scrolling or a variety of enemies may as well be disappointed now. The only thing you have to beat in this game is another student of the craft in a fight for honour.

When the dojo master signals the start of the bout, you must block and manoeuvre before delivering a winning blow. It can't be emphasised enough how important timing is to becoming an *Exploding Fist* master. Hit your opponent with quick but weak blows and you may win half a point (or one yang symbol) and a lower score, but connect with a more flamboyant move, such as the roundhouse, and you can get a full point (a yin-yang symbol) and a higher score. This system brilliantly encourages risk taking, but also leaves you more prone to quick counter-attacks.

Exploding Fist's backdrops beautifully complement the onscreen action and technically the game is excellent. Animations are fluid and the collision detection spot on. When you connect with a thumping hit the resulting crunch is enough to make you wince. In twoplayer mode there's not been anything this fun or competitive for a long time and while the C64 version is visually superior to the Spectrum's, the fighting mechanics are virtually identical.

Exploding Fist's only major flaw is in the singleplayer mode where you must battle through a number of opponents to achieve Tenth Dan status. The game's AI does not compensate adequately for the powerful leg sweep which will see off nearly every CPU adversary. That aside, Melbourne House has delivered a gutsy arena combat game that requires skill, dedication and patience to master. Not unlike the real thing.

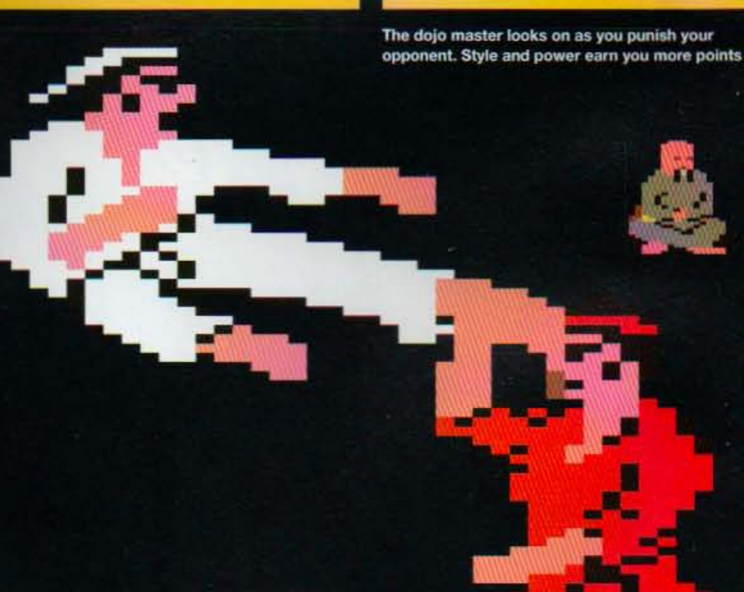
Edge rating: Eight out of ten







The dojo master looks on as you punish your opponent. Style and power earn you more points

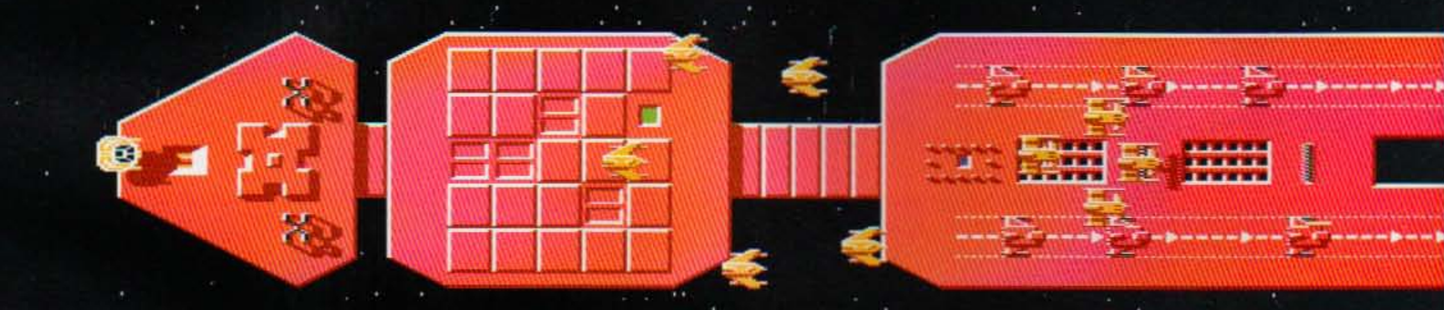


The making of…

Uridium

In an era when scrolling was a neat, if jerky new trick came Uridium, a super-slick space shooter that brought an arcade experience to the home computer. Its creators, Andrew Braybrook and Steve Turner, ensured that the title was touched with gold…



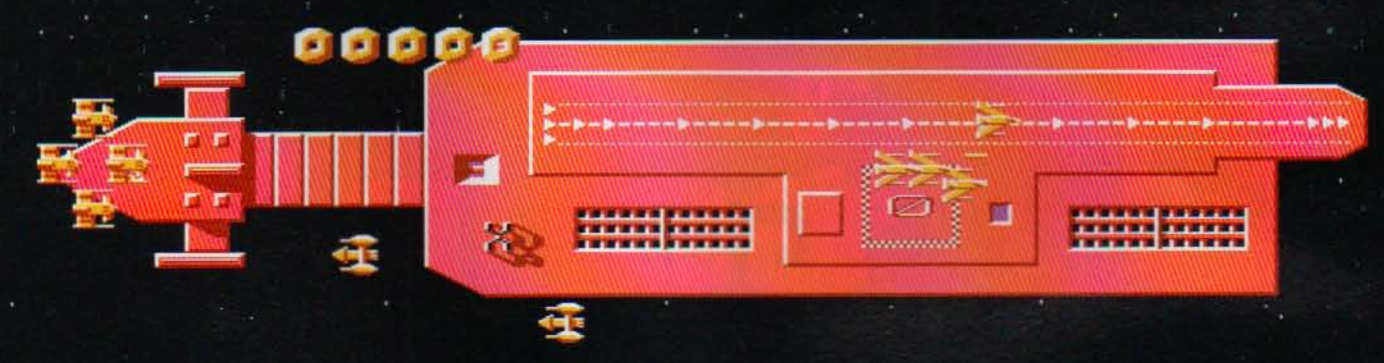


Many individual coding heroes emerged in the '80s to stamp their mark on the industry, but, unusually, it was a duo that was to produce some of the most memorable titles on the UK's home computing scene. **Steve Turner** and **Andrew Braybrook**'s Graftgold was responsible for a number of technically brilliant, not to mention fun, videogames during the Spectrum and C64's glory days. *Astroclone*, *Paradroid*, *Ranarama*, score and, crucially, thanks to smooth, flexible scrolling, a genuine feeling of immersion in a kinetic interstellar arena.

Braybrook and Turner (the former gets the design and programming credits while Turner was responsible for writing and programming the music) were commercial programmers who played games in their local pubs, and who met playing in local bands. As Braybrook explains, "We got interested in what each other was

It was a very constructive atmosphere." Braybrook agrees, "When the two of us were working from Steve's house it was probably the best times we ever had. We did what we wanted and just presented finished games to the publisher and they got released, simple as that."

Unlike *Galaga* and *Starforce*, its similarly sci-fi themed but comparatively pedestrian predecessors, *Uridium* offered you the ability to throw your spaceship around with incredible abandon.



Gribbly's Day Out and *Rainbow Islands* are fondly remembered, but it was *Uridium*, that fundamentally altered the way we, and more importantly other coders, looked at the shoot 'em up genre.

Uridium tasked you with piloting a saucer-shaped spaceship across the unravelling surface of a Super-Dreadnought, in a desperate bid to obliterate enemy gun emplacements while evading and destroying incoming fighters. Failure to concentrate would result in your craft being vapourised by gunfire from the waves of attacking ships, or in you smashing into part of the Super-Dreadnought's terrain. The game retained the simplicity of the early classic shoot 'em ups but coupled it with much slicker, elegant graphics, a baroque, epic music

doing with our various computers, and once I saw *Attack of the Mutant Camels* on the C64 I just wanted to write a game myself."

Turner continues, "I thought the games were very simple and I could think of all sorts of things to make them better but had to wait until a powerful enough home computer came along that was cheap enough to make it popular."

It was Braybrook's conversion of Turner's work onto Spectrum that convinced him that Braybrook knew what he was doing. The pair started off working in the dining room, with a couple of televisions and two computers: a Spectrum and a Dragon. "Everything was written in Assembler," says Turner. "We were always trying to better each other's work and firing ideas off each other.

The game's all about split-second timing, and being able to anticipate which way to go at any given point.

As Turner explains, "We usually started with the movement around the screen. If you had a real control then the game sort of fell into place. First you make it as easy as you can to get around in an interesting way. Then you add things to make it harder. The control must be like second nature as that gives the game its addictiveness. Our motto in *Uridium* was give the player enough rope to hang themselves. If the player dies because they made a mistake it's addictive, if they die because the game doesn't respond it's frustrating."

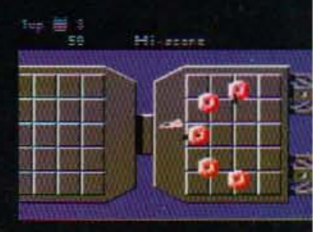
The smooth scrolling was a major factor in the success of the C64 version of the game. Braybrook

Original format: **Commodore 64**
Publisher: **Hewson**
Developer: **Graftgold**
Origin: **UK**
Original release date: **1986**

explains, "Each game we created in the early days really started with the desire to get a particular viewpoint and motion on the screen. I had always been impressed with the work of Jeff Minter and wanted to write something that played fast and furious. I wanted a more solid feel to the player craft so I drew loads of frames of it rolling and looping and spent time honing the animation and control mode. I also wanted plenty of bullets so it was time to use something other than the hardware sprites to get extra objects onscreen."

and it is your task to destroy each Dreadnought" – was created after the event. Turner says, "Scenarios were the last things on our list. Sometimes we made them up when we had finished. Later when publishers dominated the scene it reversed and you had to think of the plot and try to put down the whole game on paper before you started it. We hated that way of working. If an idea doesn't play well you scrap it and rethink, so you cannot restrict the design before you try it out."

The after-the-fact approach to creating scenarios for their games



Each Dreadnought was named after an or and gradually increased in size. Enemy wave patterns appeared with little warnin

the good ideas hopefully spawn other good ideas. Fairly late on the sound and music is added. At that point the game really comes to life and it's very tempting to just keep playing, but usually then you have









Destroying every little detail on the Dreadnoughts was incredibly addictive and going back to deliver more punishment resulted in many a lost Manta

Turner confirms Braybrook's ambitions, "Andrew wanted to achieve full framerate scrolling like arcade machines. It was the thing that made the C64 stand out as, with no graphics chips, the Spectrum was clearly inferior. When we achieved the fastest scrolling around he then added a spacecraft and a backdrop and the idea for *Uridium* emerged. Weapons came next. The meanies came last so you had something to fire at..."

These days developers are making more and more effort to emulate the pre-production processes beloved of Hollywood. By contrast the high-concept backstory of *Uridium* – "Your Manta class Space Fighter will be transported to each planet in turn

reflected the duo's organic method of production. "We tended to start each game by reworking our graphics engines," explains Turner. "During the writing of one game we would get ideas of how we could improve the engines for a new

"Give the player enough rope to hang themselves. If they die because they made a mistake it's addictive, if they die because the game doesn't respond it's frustrating"

game. The technology used to precede the game design. We both believed in interactive design which meant every stage was programmed and played and tweaked till it felt right." Braybrook continues, "Ideas get tried out, ones that don't work are thrown out and

to add more levels and graphics styles and make the game bigger. Finally we remove all the debugging code and test it some more."

That copycats appeared was no surprise to Turner, "There were quite a few imitations, for a while it was a mini-genre. It showed that the buzz you get from a game is related to the speed and control in a game, not complexity of plot or graphics." However, Braybrook was understandably miffed, "*Uridium* was released in February 1986, and within three months there were two

PING... TURKEY.

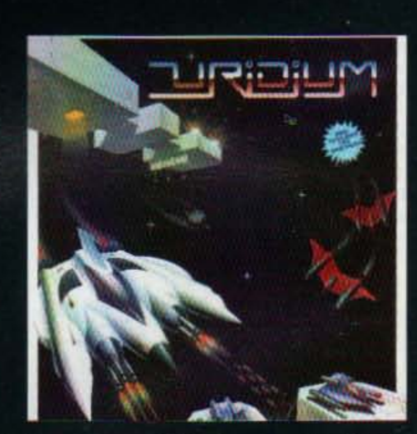
or three very close imitations. I was as mad as hell about that, as they didn't add anything to the genre and in fact some were quite sloppy, and one even used most of the same graphics. So I decided to get my own back and we spent about a month designing new graphics and new Dreadnoughts and we released *Uridium+* to teach them a lesson."

Rather than an actual sequel, *Uridium+* was more akin to an expanded and enhanced version of the original, employing almost the same game code as its predecessor, but featuring 16 different Dreadnought layouts. A genuine sequel appeared in 1993, despite some trepidation from Turner, "It was a challenge because *Uridium* was already a classic and we knew any changes would be regarded as sacrilege. However game content and graphics had evolved enormously so we knew we had to add extra content."

Braybrook takes up the story of *Uridium 2*, "I wanted to expand the scrolling to all directions, which it does at the later levels, but keep the control mode essentially the same as the original. I even used the C64 code as a reference and kept all of the scrolling and animation speeds identical to the C64. No one was going to tell me it didn't feel the same as the original."

Although the two continue to work as programmers, they no longer produce entertainment software. Turner is sanguine about the notion of re-entering a games world a million miles removed from the cottage industry approach of the '80s. "We have both been spoilt by a regular wage so it's hard to get back into games," he says. "I still play around with game ideas. I love realtime strategy and I've been developing a game that has really good AI for friendly and enemy troops so the action can be fast and furious without the player having to be everywhere at once."

Braybrook also sounds a little wistful, "The days of the one-man-band approach are long gone and will not return, games writing is now very much a team effort. Just for a brief time, though, in the mid-'80s we were able to produce something individual and individually. They were good times."



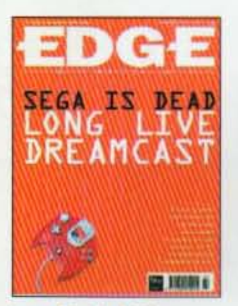
Almost as soon as *Uridium* was released on C64 and Spectrum the clones attacked. Turner and Braybrook worked fastidiously to produce *Uridium+* before less worthy and cynical facsimiles hit the market

RESET

Where yesterday's gaming goes to have a lie down

reload

Examining gaming history from **Edge**'s perspective, five years ago this month



Issue 60, July 1998

"Sega is dead," screamed the cover of **E**60. "Long live Dreamcast." Saturn lovers exhaled, wiped the spit and venom off the issue, and turned to p69. There, **Edge** performed a dissection of the project previously known as Katana, highlighting the VMS. "The only limit is the developers' ingenuity," it wrote. Well, that and the battery life and the device's sub-game.com capabilities.

Meanwhile, yet *another* feature heralded the 'Return of the Mac' as a games platform. This time, **Edge** claimed, "A rejuvenated Mac games market is there for the taking." And once more, no one was interested in taking it. Still, Mac owners always had (and still have) MAME – even if **Edge** was unimpressed, saying, "Nothing can emulate the adrenaline-pumping sensation of standing at a cabinet in a busy arcade."

Also in **E**60, the most annoying advert since the 3DO-Dodo feathers: Ocean's *Heart of Darkness* insert, a thick piece of card which couldn't be removed without some careful surgery. The blurb boasted the game was "an incredible six years in the making" – an odd thing to be proud about, but let's hope *Galleon*'s a little more than a mediocre platformer, eh?



DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?

"Dreamcast will lead to the broadest selection of games ever seen on a console system" Of course it will. And Xbox'll be an unqualified success in Japan, right, Mr Gates?

DID EDGE REALLY SAY THAT?

"It's the 20th century, why don't you try living in it." **Edge** responds, playground style, to a reader who has come to the conclusion that **Edge** "are homosexuals, or has no dick."

TESTSCREENS (AND RATINGS)

Unreal (PC, 8/10); *Vigilante 8* (PS, 7/10); *Kobe Bryant in NBA Courtside* (N64, 7/10); *Road Rash 3D* (PS, 6/10); *Sensible World Cup '98* (PC, 7/10); *Kula World* (PS, 6/10); *Bomberman Hero* (N64, 6/10); (PC, 5/10); *Hot Shots Golf* (PS, 7/10); *Deathtrap Dungeon* (PC, 7/10); *Thunder Force V* (Saturn, 6/10); *Army Men* (PC, 4/10); *Wonder 3: Arcade Gears* (PS, 7/10); *Forsaken 64* (N64, 8/10)



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1. The Dreamcast is the Best Console Everrrr! 2. Mizuguchi-san's early work on the DC, a *Mario 64*-style model of Soichiro Irimajiri's head 3. The charismatic Kenji Eno, bringing Warp's *D2* to DC 4. Paul Oakenfold, back when PlayStation was cool 5. Early shots of *Soul Calibur* 6. *Kula World*, "Pass the bucket..." captioned a slightly queasy **Edge**

pixelperfect

The industry's favourites from yesteryear. This month, Terry Stokes, **Edge**'s recently departed art editor, recalls bullying ginger-haired kids





After he'd played *Kung Fu Master*, young boys would run from Terry frightened for their lives

The game that influenced me the most was *Kung Fu Master*. It would eventually make me take up the noble fighting art of Wing Chun Gung Fu, at the age of 22. However, when *Kung Fu Master* was released at the time I thought it was totally perfect.

It had everything. Even the repetitive music was unforgettable. It was the same old tune, just high and low tones played over and over again. I suppose there was something hypnotic about this. It would make kids forget who they were and plug more cash into the machine. Although me and my friends eventually found a way of fixing the credits on the machine using a device we called a 'bubbly'.

It may have been simple but *Kung Fu Master* made you feel hard. Kick, punch and a "wallar!" kick. Five levels, five different bosses all with different fighting styles (It was just like being Bruce Lee in 'Game of Death'). And after playing I distinctly remember wanting to go out and pick on the ginger kid with the glasses. And for what reason? Because I could finish *Kung Fu Master*. Then it came out on the Commodore 64 and it was amazing, even if you still had to use your foot on the space bar to swap between punch and kick.

Then came *Yie Ar Kung Fu* and the loss of my middle finger. But that's another story.



inbox

Communicate by post:
Letters, **Edge**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW
Or email:
edge@futurenet.co.uk

I find myself in the slightly paradoxical position of writing to defend myself against comments made by Simon Byron in his column for the May issue of **Edge** magazine and also to praise him for the general scope of his argument.

While he is correct to attack the small-minded stereotyping of gamers by many in the media, and the public at large, he is wrong to include myself among the guilty.

The statement in my article for BBC News Online that, "Frankly, most gamers I have met in the light of day do not possess a wealth of social skills," is one based on experience and I'm sorry he was unable to see the difference between generalisation and empiricism. My comment was not a "media lie", as he delightfully put it, but pure and simple experience.

As an ardent gamer myself, it saddens me that most of the people I've met in person who share my passion are not the ones I would like to represent videogaming as a whole.

Luckily, magazines such as **Edge**, with insightful editorial and, on the whole, commendable columnists prove that there are indeed articulate and socially-skilled gamers out there – I've just not met many. Unfortunately, the relatively small circulation of **Edge**, next to game magazines which laud sexism and infantilism, clearly reveals that such gamers are indeed thin on the ground.

The point my article was trying to make – and I'm sorry if Mr Byron did not see it – was that developments such as online gaming with their emphasis on social interaction will change stereotypes of gamers, and almost certainly my own experience of them.

Indeed, the fourth paragraph in my article said as much: "But online gaming, putting thousands of gamers across the world in touch with one another, is beginning to make a lie of that stereotype." Yet even on Xbox Live, my overwhelming experience is of inane and obscene comments outweighing intelligent and insightful play.

Mr Byron does himself no favours, and indeed damages his own persuasive argument, by referring to people with a medical condition as "s-s-s-stuttering karaoke singers" – he is clearly unaware of the term 'hypocrisy'.

Despite such shortcomings, he is right to say that it is magazines such as **Edge**, the letters page, columns like his own, and, I believe, coverage of videogaming in mainstream media like BBC News Online, which will change perceptions over time.

I too am a geek and proud. I look forward to talking to the articulate among them on Xbox Live and in my local game shop. When that happens in greater and greater numbers I will be writing about it on BBC News Online and changing my comments accordingly.
Darren Waters

While **Edge** sympathises with your findings regarding Xbox Live, the problem with generalisation is that it's not, by and large, as accurate as empiricism. Perhaps the problem is not that the majority of gamers lack social skills but that a very vocal minority lack social skills.

Without doing the research to find out if this is so, any such generalisation is a little unfair, and suggesting that the majority of gamers lack social skills does little to extol the benefits of videogames to those for whom such comments merely cement damaging preconceptions. As for Mr Byron's hypocrisy, you're probably right, although we did find it kind of funny.

Mr Biffo is a Godsend. Double his ration of bananas post-haste and none of your usual boobery. He managed to sum up in one erratic page, the exact sentiment I felt after reading the cover feature: gamers have never had it so good.

If I'd had a copy of *The Wind Waker* and *GTAIII* in 1993, I would have happily poured kerosene on my beloved A500 and laughed as it burned. Never finishing games? I had 1,000 titles on my Amiga and I don't think I finished more than half a dozen, while I've completed dozens in the last year.

The last decade has seen more games, more choice, better overall quality and your usual bad apples. Don't get upset at bad games, just don't buy them.

I look at it as a sign of the deep-seated love we all hold for our digital pastime that we can take the very existence of bad games so personally – but it's worth remembering that Take That didn't kill the music industry and *Barbie's Race and Ride* won't kill videogames.
Alex Hutchinson, Australia

You're probably right to point out the fact that certain games are better than ever before. But it remains the case that there is a significant degree of boredom with the current crop of games – certainly to judge by the letters that **Edge** receives. Perhaps this is due to a generation of gamers growing up and acquiring a greater number of pressures on their time. But if this is the case then it is incumbent upon the industry to exert more effort on the creation of games that appeal to this increasingly alienated subset of gamers, because – again to judge by the letters that **Edge** receives – these are people who dearly want to continue gaming: it is a captive audience that the industry is doing nothing to retain. As **Edge** has argued for the past few issues.

Your reply to Helen O'Toole's letter in **E**123 suggested that publishers should consider a variable pricing structure that reflects game length, as opposed to the present one that appears to reflect either quality or age. On the surface this appears a fair enough idea – I would willingly have paid £100 had I known how much time *Ocarina of Time* would consume; likewise *GoldenEye*, *Super Mario 64* and *Red Alert*. However, take this thought to the other extreme: imagine the next *Army Men* sequel extensively marketed with PR speak like "100+ hours of gameplay" or "revolutionary new in-game engine." The informed gamer will know this is likely to be rubbish, based on previous disappointments, but it would continue to be bought by the less informed. It would be yet

> "Gamers have never had it so good. If I'd had a copy of The Wind Waker and GTAIII in 1993, I'd have happily poured kerosene on my beloved A500 and laughed as it burned"

You might not have liked 'Game Stars', but it's worth noting the circumstances that constrained its production. They might not be around next year

another nail in the coffin for the credibility of videogames as a pastime if this should occur.

In reality, there does need to be a change to the present pricing structure of videogames, but it'll have to be based in multiple areas – game quality, age, length of play, playability, sound, graphics (and all that entails), extras and so on. There is no simple answer, but the present situation will have to do for now.
Richard Evans

There wasn't really the space in **E**123 to clarify **Edge**'s position on pricing, but the real problem that you cite is the fact that videogames continue to be sold on the basis of meaningless statistics, rather than the degree by which they enrich one's life. Unfortunately the latter is always going to vary from individual to individual, and this reliance on numbers will probably remain for the foreseeable future. But if games were to be priced according to length – along the lines of the difference in pricing structures between DVD films and DVD boxsets of entire TV series – then game length might simply cease to be a selling point.

I have been a videogame journalist for quite some time now and I have been playing the damn things my whole life. In fact, my first memory of this world is of *Donkey Kong* and I treasure it dearly, though I must say that, being an undisputed sign of a time that my life will never return to, it causes me more grief than happiness. You see, I am now almost 30-years-old and I have experienced my share of nostalgia.

I can't say that my passion for videogames has subsided in any way but at this age it is impossible not to carry a different perspective, a deeper perspective. It is impossible not to look at games as works of art, pieces of a cultural puzzle that transcend everyday life, quietly and silently like a poem. That is why, your article 'Bored Gamers', felt so close to my views. For the last few years I have to live with a reputation as a pessimist because most people seem to think that videogames are doing okay. And I have to ask myself then; is it me or is this multi-billion dollar industry already rolling down the hill?

Without a doubt, originality is almost non-existent, the penetration of PS2 has somehow managed to hurt the industry instead of helping it, and after 40 years, we are still struggling to find a vocabulary for this art form, a common tongue with which it can be analysed so that people feel the need for it.

I believe that videogames have somehow missed that step, never actually having their golden age from which they can deteriorate like cinema, music or literature have done. The thing is that comparing a game of old to a game of recent times is not like comparing two parts of the same art. It feels more like comparing two different arts. The tools that the programmers used to make *Pong*, differ dramatically from the ones used in, let's say, *Ocarina of Time*. If we want to call videogames works of art, we expect to be morally and emotionally challenged by what they have to offer. If we wanted just pure gameplay, there would never be any kind of aesthetic evolution. But the evolution came. And because it was based on a rapid evolving technology, design talent suddenly stopped being needed.

Unfortunately, that is why I'm beginning to feel that videogames may never acquire the status of artistic creations in the mainstream media. There was never any smooth transition from *Pong* to *Halo*. Videogames never had their Middle Ages. And I fear that there may be no need for a *Wind Waker* to offer them a Renaissance.
Elias Pappas, Greece

Perhaps **Edge** can provide you with some cheer by disputing the facts of your analogy: the visual arts to which you refer have varied enormously over time in terms of function and form – just as videogames have. Giotto's frescoes are as far removed from Tracey Emin's notorious bed as *Pong* is from *Halo*, and yet the visual arts have made the transition from interior decoration to a respected cultural form while maintaining a broad scope and the capacity to amaze and engage. It is **Edge**'s dearly held belief that videogames are equally capable of such a transition.

So that was 'Game Stars'. Am I supposed to feel better now that we have televised recognition? Because I don't. Depressed and frustrated, yes. Better, no.

I didn't have high hopes. I only found myself watching it because games get more terrestrial airtime in commercials than they do in scheduled programming. Why then, with such an opportunity to raise the bar of games on TV, did Barrington Harvey and Granada fail so miserably?

Consider this: the presenters; the 'stars' lined up to hand out awards; the absence of acceptance speeches; a small room full of PR and marketing types; and the inclusion of the frankly unnecessary Greatest Gamer segment (which to be fair is a format deserving of its own run of shows).

Personally I feel that all of these elements conspired to further undermine the views held by the elusive non-gaming mainstream audience that the show was presumably designed for.

With a medium such as TV seen by millions it comes with both great opportunity and great responsibility. In this case I can't help but feel that the opportunity has been missed and the responsibility not met and as such this show has done more harm than good.
Richard Healy

There is no disputing the flaws that you correctly highlight. But getting a show like 'Game Stars' off the ground from scratch, in the face of significant regulatory obstruction and against the backdrop of TV schedules which, as you point out, continue to marginalise videogames is a hugely admirable feat, and probably unlikely to do as much harm as you seem to think. It's certainly a great building block from which to challenge the regulatory framework, to allow next year's show to meet its responsibility in full.

"After 40 years, we are still struggling to find a vocabulary for this art form, a common tongue with which it can be analysed so that people feel the need for it"

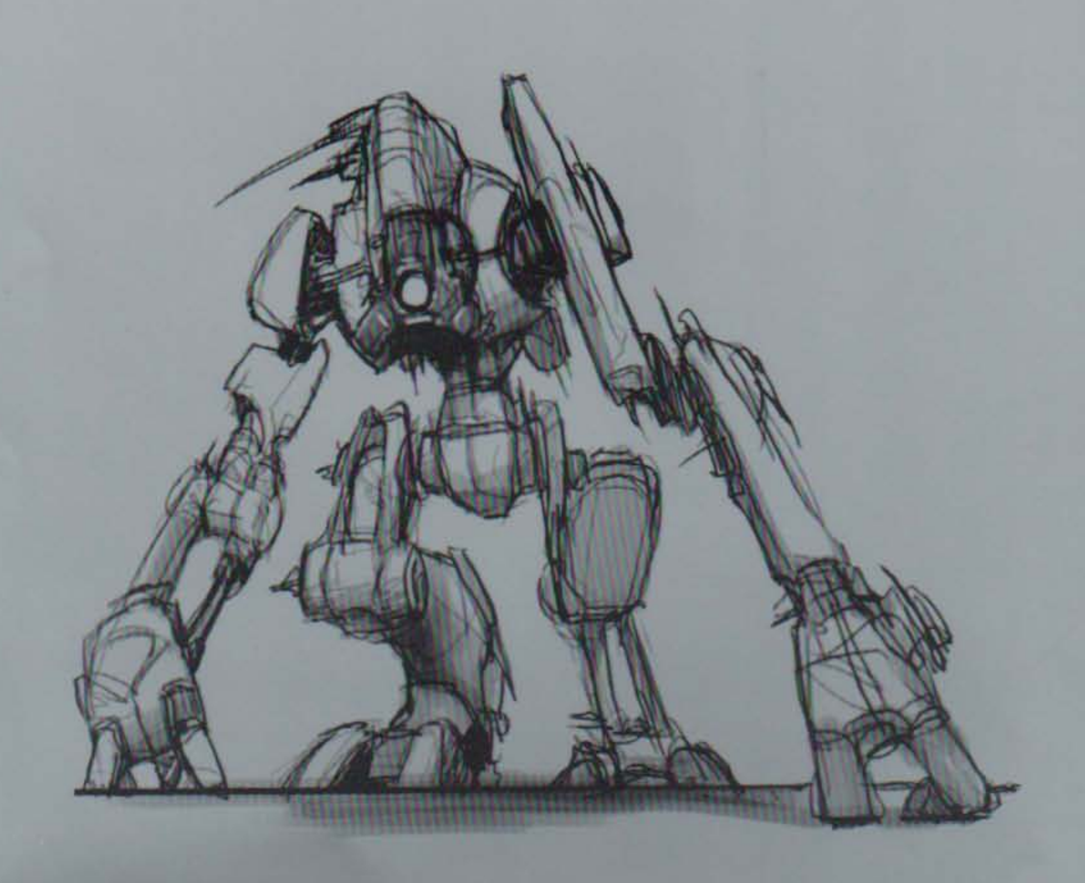




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